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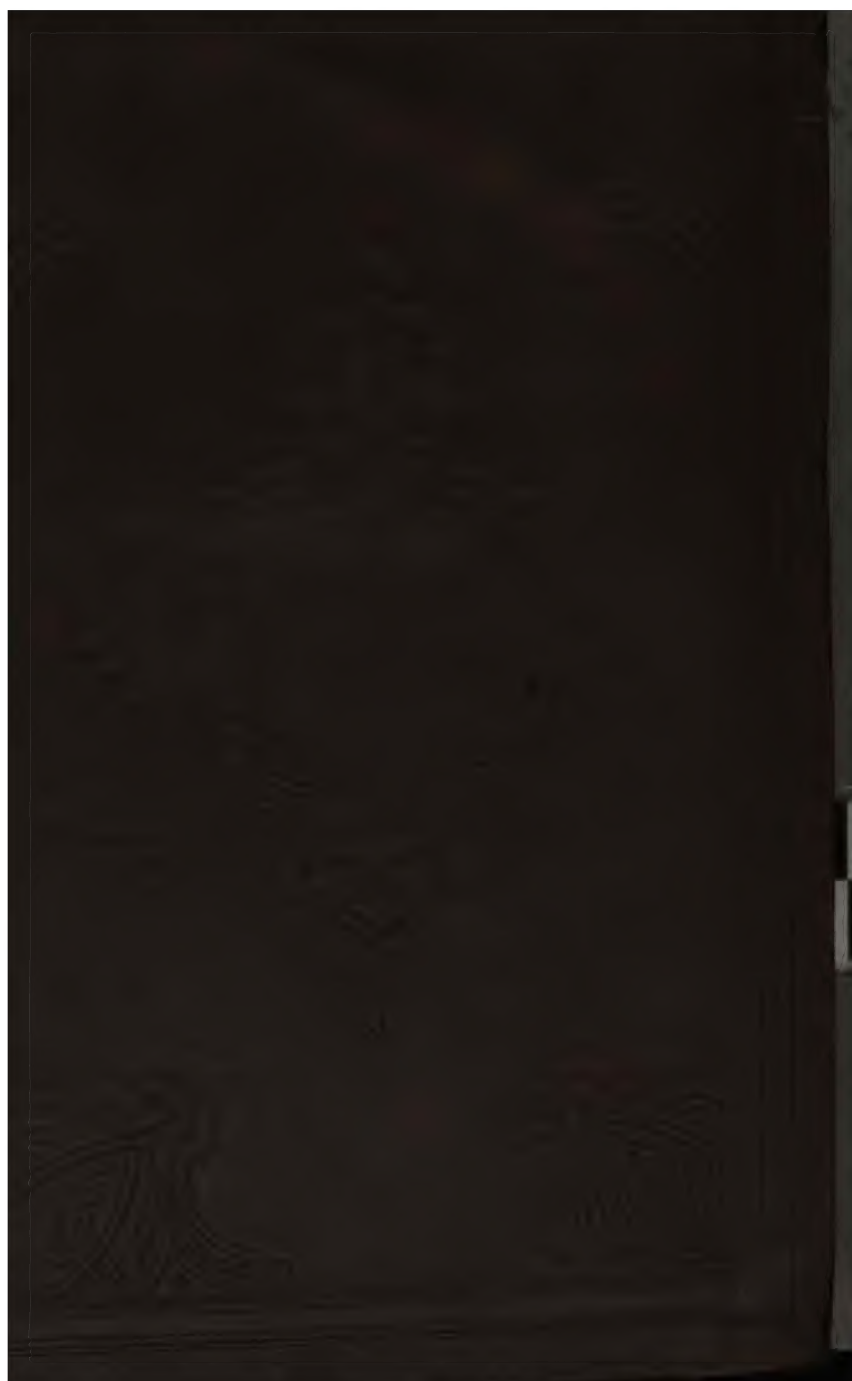
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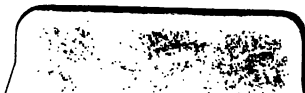
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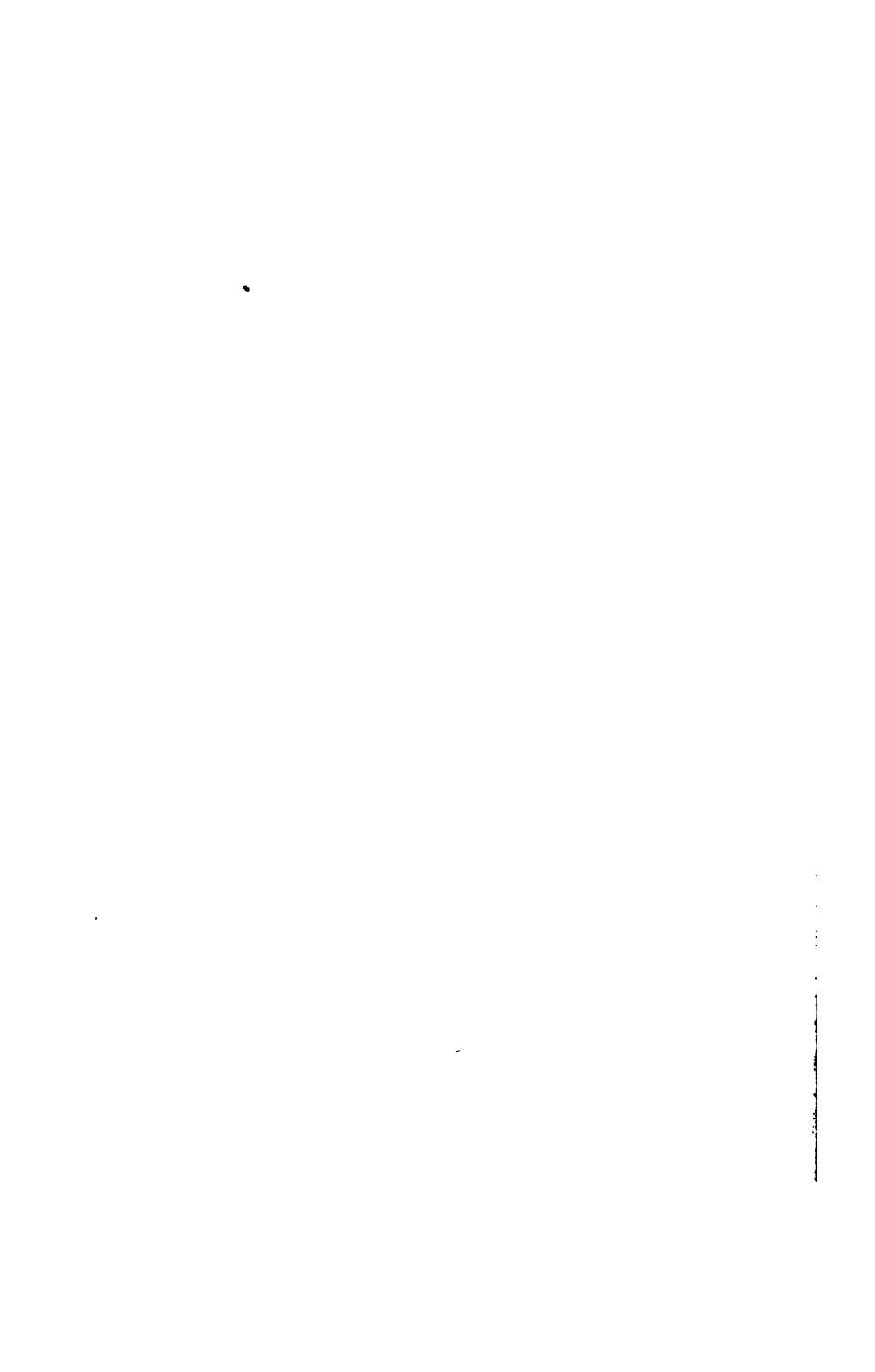




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# VOLTAIRE AND HIS TIMES.



# VOLTAIRE AND HIS TIMES.

BY L. F. BUNGNER,

AUTHOR OF "FRANCE BEFORE THE REVOLUTION," "HISTORY OF  
THE COUNCIL OF TRENT," ETC.

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION.

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## PREFACE.

THIS work is the complement of another, and the introduction to a third.

In our "Three Sermons under Louis XV.,"\* we attempted to portray French society in the eighteenth century, religious intolerance side by side with corruption of morals, license before liberty.

Hereafter, if God shall lend us life and strength, we will resume the history at the point at which we have left off, and will close only with the bloody days which marked the close of the century.

Here, then, there is only a pause, of which we avail ourselves for the purpose of taking a general view of the collective character of that epoch, and of studying in fuller detail some of the questions by which it was agitated.

Of those which we had developed with sufficient fulness in our previous work, we have had to say no more here than was requisite for the understanding of the rest. Hence the small space occupied by some important subjects, among others, the affairs of the Jesuits.

\* "France before the Revolution; or, Priests, Infidels, and Huguenots in the Reign of Louis XV.," 2 vols., uniform with "Voltaire and his Times," price 7s. Edinburgh: Constable & Co.

Moreover, we have made no effort to dissemble that we have been writing with an eye to the debates of the present day. We are aware that we shall displease many ; but we know likewise that we have said what many think. Let but these last be so good as not to disown us, and perhaps they themselves will be surprised to find they are supported by such numbers in condemning what we have condemned, and desiring what we desire. This, if ever, is the moment for people saying what they think, and thinking what they say.

OCTOBER 1850.

## INTRODUCTION.

A PLAYER, we are told, while sitting for his portrait, began, for his amusement, to give himself insensibly the different faces which he knew how to assume when on the stage. The painter, in distraction, lamented the unmanageableness of his pencil. It was a long time before he perceived that it was the original that was changing.

I, too, have long despaired, in spite of incessant studies, of seizing the flitting and capricious lineaments of the age I wished to paint; I, too, have taken courage and comfort from seeing it escape more or less from many of those who had fancied they had caught its likeness.

This excuse, in fact, I felt necessary, not only for my own acquittal, but also and mainly as an apology to myself for a work professedly new on a subject that had been treated by so many authors, and in particular by one whom everybody has read, and whose name is instantly suggested by the mention of the eighteenth century, and of Voltaire.

More than one friend has asked me, sometimes in serious alarm about me, sometimes perhaps with an approach to a sneer, whether then I proposed to retouch Villemain. My answer then, as it is now, was that M. Villemain has had few more constant or sincere admirers than I; but would he him-



self, I added, had he the same things to treat now, treat them as he did then? Twenty years have almost doubled the distance that parted us from the last century, when he finished his review of it. Twenty years,—it is more than Tacitus called *grande mortalis ævi spatium*. Twenty years,—it is much at any epoch, and, in our days, seems almost an age.

I have not, therefore, deluded myself into any false estimate of my capacity. I have only perceived, like every one else, that these twenty years have thrown light on many things that the ablest had missed seeing in all their bearings, or in which it was at that time impossible to be candid and impartial.

Far be it from me to say that the illustrious author I have named was wanting in frankness; but there are positions in which one does not easily keep true to one's-self. In every great crisis, it is the crowd that leads, and it is the part of the chiefs to obey. "Your people have done nothing but acts of folly," it was said once to a great leading man of our days. "Why, then, don't you direct them? what would you have?" he replied; "I was their chief."

M. Villemain, then, was, in 1828 and 1829, the chief of that ardent youth which, in spite of himself, erected his professor's chair into a tribune, turned his lessons into philippics, and his most insignificant statements of opinion into oracles; but he was chief on one condition: that of advancing in the line traced for him day by day by the applauses of his audience, by the interested eulogies of the newspapers, and the annoyances of the Government.

That line lay in an odd enough middle course between the old scepticism, which was decidedly in disgrace as frigid and in bad taste, and Christianity, which had come back, but with the accompaniment of Jesuits and confession-tickets. He behoved neither to attack it, for that would have been taken ill,

as a mere reproduction of Voltaire, nor to defend it, at least directly, for the public would have cried out that he was a Jesuit. He had to respect both his enemies and himself, both the *Encyclopédie* and the Gospel, both the monarchy and the Revolution; he had to erect a temple in which both Voltaire and *the wretch* should have their thrones.

Hence the unheard-of finessing which M. Villemain thought it incumbent on him to employ; hence, also, that equal complacency shown in the appreciation of the most contrary tendencies, in the eulogies to be given to men of the most unequal amount of talent and of the utmost diversity of character and manners. If the eighteenth century, as M. Villemain himself has said, was the golden age of middling authors, his book is certainly their Pantheon.

II.—Our old criticism, that especially of the eighteenth century, had the grand defect of not making sufficient account of the individual or public circumstances under the empire of which a man has lived and thought. Authors, books, all the productions, in short, of the human mind, were studied and tried by it, according to the prevailing theories of the day.

The contrary excess has now arrived, and almost without transition. In vain have enlightened minds signalized it from the outset. "The eighteenth century," wrote Madame de Staël, in 1809, "laid down principles in too absolute a manner; perhaps the nineteenth will comment on facts with too much submission." This *perhaps* became a reality in history, politics, and literature. After having too much justified this remark himself, M. Villemain has had numerous successors,—men who have inherited his dangerously indulgent spirit, without possessing that exquisite and unerring taste which held with him the place of principles. According

to another author,\* whom I nowise confound with those critics who have no fixed opinions, but who has given them but too much encouragement on this point, the best critic is he who best identifies himself with the authors whom he criticizes. This may hold in certain cases, and specially, if one will have it, in poetry; but poetry herself no sooner takes, or allows to be given her, a part in social dissensions, than she loses her right to plead honestly her claim to be excepted. All the more let us distrust these dangerous appeals in matters which bear only on philosophy and history. Would a judge be the more just, the more he should put himself in the place of the accused persons brought before him? All well, acting as a Christian and a private person; but in the discharge of a public duty,—and criticism is that,—the first point is to call good good, and evil evil.

III.—This relaxation of principle, for the rest, has been but the literary application of a system now almost universally prevalent, that of historical fatalism in general.

*That was—that ought to have been.* Such, for some years, has been the fundamental axiom. You find it, under all forms in all the publications of the day. Between those who proclaim it and those who yield to it, hardly shall we find a few who timidly ask, if, indeed, this be the final conclusion of reason and conscience.

That was—that ought to have been. Here we have the past absolved; here we have the future exposed to all the horrors and the follies that some men would resuscitate.

But if these horrors, which God forbid, are once more to return, who shall most have contributed to bring them back? The men whom we hear celebrating them and calling for them? No; for these men are strong only because of the genera

\* St. Beuve.

timidity and depression. But the authors of this general depression, the men of the *fait accompli*, those who make it their philosophy and their justice not to be indignant at anything, those who have contrived to mingle with their tears for the victims, admiration for their executioners—these are our real pests; these are the men who have really sown all the tempests that now disturb society, and those which we and our children may yet be destined to reap.

Let not our impartiality go so far, then, as to excuse—as has been done—sometimes the men by putting their faults on the age, sometimes the age by putting its faults on the men, in order, in the end, to have nothing to censure. Let us not come with a system ready-made and brutally unbending; but better that than fluctuate from the *pro* to the *con*, and plead successively all causes. You thus are no longer impartial; you are but feeble and cowardly; you think you are showing a good heart, and you only show a craven spirit.

IV.—This, then, is not the impartiality which we shall carry into the study of the eighteenth century. That century was so severe towards others that we have no reason to be indulgent towards it.

Yet it is not without a certain fearfulness that we approach it. It had such an overweening confidence in itself. It looked with such a lofty and distant air on whoever dared to seem to criticize it. Like one of those dead corpses which, although dead, still keep you at a distance, and which you find it difficult to figure to yourself motionless, powerless, the prey of worms: your imagination resuscitates them; you seem to hear their voice, and quail before them as they eye you.

More than once has this feeling come over me as I worked at this book. I seemed to wander in an immense cemetery

peopled with the dead of yesterday, whose wraiths\* prowled about their graves, themselves invisible, but seeing me, following me. I felt as if some restless eye looked over my shoulder to read the line I had scrolled; I could almost have feared, on looking round, to find myself confronted with the men I had been dissecting. Yes, in the course of my long watchings, at the hour when the expiring lamp flickers in its socket, and when fatigue is fever, more than once I seemed to hear, at my very ear, the grinning laugh which Ferney sent abroad to all the echoes of Europe. The man who for sixty years had laughed at everything and everybody, I could not but fancy laughing still, and laughing too a little at myself.

It is because I have been living with him in spite of myself, as much and more than with all his cotemporaries put together. In all questions, in all facts, he was for ever re-appearing. Not a list of names complete without his; not a picture truly representing the times but had his face in it, and almost always in the first sketch. The history of Voltaire is that of the eighteenth century; the history of the eighteenth century is that of Voltaire. The age and the man are one.

V.—One, I say, but how?

The incarnation of an age in one man takes place, according to the times, in two different ways.

Sometimes it is the man that takes the lead. He calls to other minds, and those other minds follow him. He lays hold of all the vital forces of society, and gathers them into his hand. Such is the reign of genius; such the lot of young and vigorous generations.

Sometimes it is the age itself that has selected from among its men the one who is to be its leader. This chosen chief is condemned thenceforth to have but one thought—that of

\* There being no English word for *revenant*, I use the Scotch word *wraith*.—*Trans.*

maintaining his seat. All his faculties, all his genius perhaps—for it is not impossible that he may have genius—he will be found to consecrate to the study and the service of the tastes of the multitude. He will acquire an astonishing ability for anticipating everything that is wanted from him. He will guess men's longings before they are expressed; nay, before they are felt. He will have the air of one that leads, but only because he will contrive never to advance, unless precisely in the way that is wished for. Unity, in the one case, arose from all men becoming fused in one; in the other, it arises from there being one man to make himself all things to all. This is the reign of talent, this the lot of ages sunk in anility and weakness.

Such, then, shall we find to have been evidently the part that belonged to Voltaire in the eighteenth century. Ask not from him those bursts of genius, those powerful inspirations which seize a people's inmost feelings, agitate them, temper them anew, create for them a life and a faith. Possibly—and it is a praise we cannot refuse him, possibly he might in other times have had these regenerating inspirations. Even his everlasting laugh did not prove him incapable of enthusiasm. He would weep at the theatre: hardly, it is true, at any play that was not his own, and always so far that he might set the example; but, after all, he wept, and one does not weep at will.\* In an epoch where, in order to be powerful one must have been great, I believe Voltaire would have been great.

That, however, he never was; he served his age as that age desired to be served. Wit was required of him, and wit he

\* "It was a little disagreeable to find one's-self next him at a play, for he could not command himself. Tranquil at first, he insensibly became animated; his voice, his feet, his walking-stick, became more or less audible. He would half rise from his chair, sit down again, then at once stand bolt upright, appearing six inches taller than he really was. It was then that he was most noisy."—*Mémoires of Vauquière* (Voltaire's secretary).

scattered with a liberal hand. Fine verses were wanted of him—these he made; but he was never asked for poetry, that of the heart I mean,—and he had it not. “I admit in him the perfection of mediocrity,” said one of his enemies, the Abbé Trublet; and though *mediocrity* sounds ill, I agree, when treating of Voltaire, that this judgment is in some respects one of the best that has been passed upon him. Had I to repeat it, I should not understand by it, any more, no doubt, than the Abbé Trublet, that Voltaire was a mediocre person; my notion would be this, that even in the pages where he is true, pure, noble, even, in a word, in those in which you find nothing reprehensible, in which you feel that he has reached perfection in its kind, you never feel yourself, notwithstanding, placed among the loftiest elevations of genius or of virtue, never in that high atmosphere to which a Bossuet, or a Pascal, or a Newton, would lift you by a word.

VI.—This character—and therefore it is that I have made a point of defining it accurately—was common to all the men and all the writings of that time. Everywhere you find wit, but little soul; much reason, little good sense; fine verses, no poetry; big words, and of conviction none.

No, there was no conviction in that school; no more in philosophy and in morals, where people fancied they had some, than in religion in which they gloried in no longer having any. This I shall ere long prove; and as for myself, I have had the proof of it at every step of my study of that epoch.

That proof I have found not only in the private and anecdotic history of the leading personages. All the seriousness that was wanting in them when I saw them in their undress, I had previously searched for in vain in their books. Sincere love of the true does not speak so much about truth; love of virtue does not speak so much about virtue. One is not

naturally so lavish in naming what one loves. If virtue is at times no better than a word, it is certainly at epochs when that word is in every mouth, and read on every page.

I can make no exception, then, for the man who has spoken most of it, and whom many would no doubt name first to me, had they to deny what I have said. "What do you make of Rousseau?" would they say; and after having read or recalled some morsel of his writings, which I possibly admire no less than they,\* they might ask me if there could be any mediocrity in the conviction from which such eloquence could burst.

There might, would be my reply. It is true, there could not have been at all times, or in any author, whatever his ability. For this there behoved to be at once a man with whom imagination was powerful enough to compensate for whatever else was wanting, and an age so little difficult to please in serious things as to dispense with this man's having only imagination. But this age did exist; that man we really meet with. Such is the key to Rousseau's success.

I go farther. I say he owed his success to that want of conviction which, in other times, would have proved the greatest obstacle to his triumphs.

It was not from any want of consciousness of the same thing in themselves, or that at bottom they really differed from Voltaire, that people would say of him, that he was "factitious from head to foot." Let us rid ourselves of the idea that the eighteenth century, at least until the approaches of the Revolution, took up Rousseau seriously. The poor Abbé de St. Pierre, who had said nearly the same things, but really believing them, had met with nothing but raillery. There was no love felt for men of conviction; they were instinctively repelled as living protests against the levity of the age.

\* "It is Diogenes; but he sometimes speaks like Plato."—Voltaire, *Letter to Helvetius*, 1763.



Rousseau had the forms of conviction; these men forgave him because they were sensible that he had none of the reality. They felt a certain pleasure in abandoning themselves to him, but this because there was seen to be nothing more in it than a play of the intellect; the moment one could have had the idea that he was preaching seriously, his reign was at an end. He was listened to as, in the days of the schoolmen, one would have listened to their subtle syllogizers; and in the field of morals, all whom he might have frightened by the austereness of his precepts, he but too well reassured by the spectacle of his manners.

Hence the patience with which his insults were listened to; hence the pleasure people took in the war so bluntly declared against the very things which they least desired to destroy, or to allow to be destroyed; hence those odd contrasts that amused a fickle generation, and put no check on the course it was resolved to follow. The age was vicious and Rousseau preached virtue; he preached virtue and was himself vicious. Men imagined that by means of the sciences and arts, they had reached the highest point of social refinement; you find him begin with an attack on the arts and sciences; in these he affects to see the source of all evils. In the face of an absolute government he is found preaching liberty; but hardly have people begun after him to repeat the word, than it becomes no longer, in his thoughts, what had formerly been understood by it; for he merely substitutes for the despotism of kings, the more degrading and oppressive despotism of the mob. You will find him unbelieving enough to be assailed by the believers—believing enough to be assailed by the unbelieving; and the public proceeds to interest itself, as it always does, in the man who is opposed singly to all. Next, while it is he that leaves all the beaten paths, he goes about exclaiming that it is his enemies that are doing so. From his

first defiance to the ideas of his time, in the very discourse against the arts and sciences, you find him exclaim, "O mad love of distinction, of what are you not capable!" At the very moment of his entering full sail into that ocean of paradoxes, which was to have no shores for him, we find him declaiming against "those futile declaimers," who, says he, "armed with their deadly paradoxes," go about sapping the foundations of all that has been held sacred among mortals.

VII.—Here, perhaps, there is a fresh paradox; but it strikes me that Voltaire, with his levity of tone and his never-ending sarcasms, was more the serious man of the age than his grave and sententious rival. All his sayings, for him, hit the mark; all his shafts pierced to the quick. The work of the age was his; none more entirely devoted to it. He does not say so, but people know it, and nobody in Europe doubts it; while what Rousseau seeks, above all things, is Rousseau. Voltaire liberally put his glory at the service of the cause; Rousseau always let it be seen, in serving it, that he ever thought more of himself than it, and that, in reality, he cared little about its triumph. Voltaire asked not for martyrdom, but for victory; Rousseau wanted only the struggle, and in it sought only for the name of martyr. "He would be delighted to be hanged," said Voltaire, "provided his name were in the sentence."

Why, then—shall it be said—represent them as having served the same cause? Hardly shall we find any points on which they were agreed, and even when agreed on the things themselves, they were never so on the reasons.

This is all true; but when the general current is powerful enough to sweep along with it, in one heap, all individualities and all antipathies, they must needs also be all reckoned one in the general estimate men take of the epoch.

In an era of peaceful disputes, in which there were expended, with little noise, under an absolute king, the life and the force which a great age did not dare to expend in other contests, little was required in order to dig an abyss between two men.

But let there arise a freer age, a contest more serious, an aim more distinctly traced, and then, in spite of appearances, in spite of the combatants themselves, there will be found but one army and one flag. It will be as with soldiers, who may, indeed, quarrel in the ranks, but who, not the less, all march on to the same assault.

It is not, then, without reason that these two men are vulgarly associated in a common eulogy, or in a common anathema; it is not accidentally, or by an abuse, that their names seem to respond to each other, as their two tombs are placed side by side in the obscurity of the same vault. By uniting them in their death, the Revolution proclaimed the unity of their work. She acknowledged herself their daughter. She was their daughter.

VIII.—But she was not their daughter—mark well!—in this sense, that the one produced what was good in the Revolution, the other what was bad.

Some have thrown back on Voltairian impiety all the excesses with which liberty came to be stained; others—those who made little account of religion, and much, as Voltaire did, of social order—have attributed the subversion of it to Rousseau; others, in fine, like Bernardin de St. Pierre, have openly maintained that the latter was the good genius of his age, and Voltaire the bad.

These special distinctions have in our days been renounced; but they have been unhappily renewed in the appreciation made of the men and systems actually existing. People dread

to condemn men in the mass; they persist in choosing among the demolishers. Some—those, to wit, who call things by their proper names—are condemned; still satisfaction is felt, it seems, when some extenuating circumstance can be pointed out, and one can find an excuse for not pronouncing as the first warmth of indignation would dictate. Others, and these the greater number—men who either do not know or do not say the last word—people think themselves obliged to treat as honest thinkers, only as somewhat fickle, somewhat hollow, and ready, for the rest, to return to the right way when the mines they have been digging shall have exploded.

Ah! no doubt those grand destructives of the eighteenth century would have returned also, had they seen what their work was to come to in the hands of their adepts. Call to mind Raynal and his courageous letter,\* Condorcet and his bloody despair. Yes, Voltaire would have denounced the Reign of Terror very differently from the way in which he denounced that of the League; he would not assuredly have spared so many new follies the lash of his old scourge. As for Rousseau, I love to figure him to myself snatching from the hands of Robespierre those pages, so gentle in form, so ruthless in reality, in which the man of the guillotine had learned coolly to calculate how many heads had to be taken off in order that the *Social Contract* might become the gospel of France. Voltaire and Rousseau, the day on which a Marat was given them as their companion in sepulture and in glory, seem in my ears to mutter with rage in their dust; I think I see them start up, and thrust him from them with horror.

Such is the rehabilitation I offer them. On this ground I am ready almost to stretch forth a fraternal hand to them across the tomb. If this be any compensation, I will grant it them, and with all my heart, every time I shall have per-

\* May 31, 1791.

mitted myself to try and to condemn them. But to curb my feelings, and to absolve them because they did not, in set terms, command the evil that was done in their names—never; and would to God well-meaning people had never indulged such weakness, either towards the living or towards the dead! We should not, in that case, now be where we are. Do all justice to whatever may be found here and there of generous instincts in that chaos; say, if you will, that the eighteenth century prepared the world for the reign of more than one great principle which Christianity had proclaimed in vain; but forget not that it has done this while trampling under foot those very principles, and that their establishment would prove its definitive condemnation. In visiting the fields that have been fertilized by the ashes of Etna and Vesuvius, you may admire how good is made to come out of evil; but you would not, for all that, make those terrible volcanoes the benefactors of the countries in which they stand, and you would view with pity the men who would erect altars to them.

IX.—But granting that the history of the eighteenth century were a little less our own, it would still be interesting to examine how forces so diverse concurred towards the same result, and, to return to our two names, how Voltaire and Rousseau could have been, at the same time, at the head of the same generation.

One, I have said—Voltaire, to wit—led while following; the other will be found to lead only in breaking with the age; but this will still be found to be, at bottom, only a particular manner of following it, and serving it according to its tastes—for this age is fond of contrasts, opposition, and surprises. The former laughed at social prejudices, and respected them; the latter will tell you that a king ought not to hinder his

son from marrying the woman of his choice, were she the hangman's daughter. You suppose that this very expression will revolt people. Not at all; it will please by its very bluntness. Voltaire you will find exclaiming against it in vain. For the first time, you will find Voltaire not listened to, and fair ladies themselves siding with him whom, in his indignation, Voltaire called "I know not what sort of savage knave."

The one, accordingly, thought men naturally bad, and dealt gently with them; the other called them naturally good, and yet loaded them with abuse. According to Voltaire, the remedy is in civilization; according to Rousseau, it is civilization that has spoilt all. The one pushes you blindly forward towards a future big with storms; the other thrusts you poetically back upon a savage past, anterior to all known times, and even to the ancient golden age. He well knows that he aims at the impossible, but he pleases himself with it, and holds to it, were it for nothing but to be able to say that people don't listen to him, that mankind are no longer in a condition to comprehend him. Voltaire promises happiness as soon as people shall have destroyed certain things, and, in particular, Christianity; Rousseau maintains that people will never destroy enough, and that all progress, meanwhile, will be found one chain, one disorder, one corruption more. He does not hate Christianity in itself, and, of all advances, it is that which he pardons the most; but it is one, and, worse still, it is the source of more. Christianity, accordingly, will be found, from that alone, excluded from a system in which savage life is the *beau idéal*; and while its grand crime, for Voltaire, was its having put the drag on civilization, its grand fault, in the eyes of Rousseau, was its having smoothed the way for it.

In their whole character and movements, we see the same

diversity, the same contrasts. The one does his best to add to the influence of talents, that of position and riches; the other glories in being nothing, and in having nothing. Voltaire speaks of "my château," and is none the prouder for it; Rousseau complains of the high price of bread, as you can see pride peeping through the holes in his mantle. They both spend their lives in complaints—the poor man in his voluntary poverty, the rich one of his failing health, still endurable after living eighty years. But Voltaire passes jest on his maladies, even when real; Rousseau would fain tell the whole human race should weep with him over his, even when imaginary. Often, moreover, they both make themselves ridiculous—the one by his seriousness about trifles, the other by his levity on the gravest subjects. But the latter, with his inexhaustible malice, is sometimes kindly; the former, with his universal philanthropy, has always some gall in his ink, and sometimes a great deal. Even when he is in the right, his tone is that of a sophist rather than of the man who is himself convinced; Voltaire, even when in the wrong, is natural, and, in some sort, candid. You find him lie, and tell often; but he does not mix up with his lies fervent apostrophes to truth and virtue. He makes victims, and boasts of doing so; Rousseau tries to make them, yet, to hear him speak, you would think there is no victim but himself. He loves to say and to believe that he is surrounded with enemies\*—he makes it his glory to agree with nobody; and Voltaire, on the contrary, loves to repeat that everybody is

\* "He was a realization to me," said Corancez, one of the last of the friends that remained to him, "of the possible existence of Don Quixote. In both I find a sensitive chord. That chord, when in vibration, suggests to the one the ideas of knight-errantry; in the other, that chord resounded enemies, a general coalition, a vast plan for his destruction. With both, the repose of that chord left the mind its full liberty." But not easy to find, in the life of Rousseau, moments in which it was not more or less in vibration.

his way of thinking, except some downright fools, to whom public reason will soon have done justice. An independent and great lord, he is thankful for the services of the smallest persons; Rousseau, on the contrary, needs help from every body, and you cannot be of use to him, but forthwith he sets himself to hate you.\* He is, on the whole, not so good as his writings; Voltaire is often better than his.

The same diversity, in fine, appears in the influence which they proceeded, in parallel lines, to exercise on the epoch in which they lived. Voltaire carried opinion along with him; but as he taught men only to deny, and preached in fact no system, he had not, and could not have, disciples properly so called. Rousseau had disciples, and even enthusiastic ones. To say the truth, he could hardly have any other, for there is no middle course with him. People love him, or they hate him; he is listened to as an oracle, or thrust off as a fool. Voltaire, on the contrary, will be found to have influenced even those who detested him—that clergy whom he lashed, those old magistrates who would fain have had it in their power to burn him along with his books. We spoke of him as having no disciples: let us rather say that he had but one, that one, however, being all the world, including Rousseau.

\* Without giving our applause to the sarcasms with which Voltaire attacked a man who was profoundly miserable, one can hardly deny that he had reason to represent him as

“Biting equally the hand  
That binds him, or that strikes his head,  
And that which offers to him bread.”

Even in the *Civil War of Geneva*, side by side with many disgusting insults, there are many just strokes.

“No man more knowing in respect of friends,  
These he embraces, and for ever quits.  
Ingratitude the first of all his merits;  
His lofty soul his benefactors hates.  
He gnashes if a man possess the power  
And will, and have the impudence  
To vilify him with his deeds of love.”



But the latter was destined to become more particularly the master of characters, the generator of future individualities. He was to unite together in one family all the men whose lot it was to influence, for good or evil, the transformations which Voltaire had prepared for him—to inspire, at the same time, Mirabeau and the author of *Paul and Virginia*, Robespierre and Chateaubriand.

X.—Such is the parallel which I should have to develop, not only between the two coryphæuses of that epoch, but also between the subaltern chiefs, the schools, the books, all the contradictory elements which constitute the life of that period of time. Therefore it is that I have paused upon it, for my whole book lies there. All the features that I have marked, my readers will meet again as they travel through this work. They will help me to introduce order into all parts of it that are capable of receiving it.

But a strictly regular picture would not fairly represent an epoch so essentially irregular, and where all things are so crossed and intermingled. I might, no doubt, announce that I was about to study the eighteenth century under four or five different points of view: literary life, social life, political life, moral, or, if you will, immoral life, religious or irreligious life. These seem to make excellent headings of chapters; but I am convinced that in adopting them I should have but a factitious regularity in which unity would be had at the expense of truth.

Let us be content with the unity of interest. It was in the bosom of the eighteenth century that there fermented all the elements of our own—the good, the bad, those that have already run out their course, those which are only beginning to act, and those, for such there are, which will not exhibit themselves till afterwards. In studying that epoch, you feel

yourself as if in an atmosphere of storm; the calm as yet unbroken, except that to those who listen, the distant murmur of the coming havoc is already heard. You see here and there, detaching itself from the mountain-top, that handful of snow which goes on rolling down, and enlarging, and never stopping until it has overwhelmed everything at the foot. But as it passes down, you see nothing but the clapping of hands among men who are delighted at its progress, and regret their having to die before it has attained all its velocity and all its force. For at that time it was not enough to have lived in the midst of the whirlwind; one must needs die in it. Woe to the wretch who had the weakness to give the lie, by a Christian death, to the temerities of his previous life!

What a guard, accordingly, was kept around the dying agony of any one who had once become a liege member of the destructive party! What alarm was felt lest there should escape from him a word, a sign, that might suggest a scruple to the survivors!\* What haste shown to overwhelm with calumny or ridicule any one who might have wished to inspire the dying man with a little repentance for his past life—a little faith in that future whither death was about to hurry his soul!

Well, then, those efforts which were then made, often, it is true, with more zeal than intelligence, for the conversion at their last moments, of the chiefs of the reigning infidelity, let us make more wisely if we can around that deathbed on which the age they lived in is now laid. That age is dying, but it

\* "The president Hénault is said to be very ill. I should much like to know if to his disease he adds that of devotion. With the wit he possesses, could he possibly be such an ass?"—Voltaire, Letter to Argental, 1763.

"I should much like to know if M. Argenson has died like a philosopher or like a wet chicken. There are Jesuits impudent enough to say that M. de Montesquieu died an *imbécile*; and they arrogated to themselves the right to engage others to die the same."—Letter to Madame du Deffand, 1764.

"Had I not been there, d'Alembert would have played the coward."—Condorcet.

is not yet dead. Let us not speak of it too much as past. It has frightful rallyings; it lives; it dictates still, though with a broken voice, those verdicts which more than one young voice continues to repeat and comment upon. At the hazard of meeting with the Jesuit, Routh, who confessed Montesquieu, or with that poor parish priest who wished to confess Voltaire, let us approach; and, if it be possible for us to snatch from this obstinate moribund some lessons for the benefit of those now living, our labour will not have been thrown away.

# VOLTAIRE AND HIS TIMES.

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## CHAPTER I.

- I.—The Abbé Dangeau and his verbs—Boileau and his rhymes—Last look at the peaceful lives of former times—The botanist Morin—Cassini—God everywhere—People dispensed with being amiable—The two Cornelles—Racine's domestic establishment—The joys and the cares of that time—The *belles-lettres*—How and in what spirit they were loved.
- II.—Have we here, nevertheless, the proper idea of a man of letters?—This calm could only be listlessness—Men admirable; system false—Literature ought not to be only an art—The eighteenth century was right in principle, in assigning it a political and moral mission.
- III.—It was about to become no longer an end, but a means—The art, as an art, no longer exciting interest, the grand aim becomes influence—Those who do not seek it are compelled to exercise their share of it.—IV.—Rollin—How he became a powerful agent—The son of a cutler and the son of a shoemaker—He was adopted as a man of opposition and a man of the movement—What pledges he had given as a Jansenist, as rector of the university, and professor—He became, unconsciously, a tribune.—V.—His *Ancient History*—His *Roman History*—Success which nothing in these two works explains—Tedium—Plagiarism—Credulity—Little or no erudition—No local colouring—*Messieurs les Athéniens*.—VI.—It is heart speaking to heart—Inadequacy of this explanation—Vertot and d'Aguesseau promoters, like Racine, of the eighteenth century.
- VII.—The dead made to act the same part—Fénelon—What he was to become under infidel pens—His *éloge* by Maury and by La Harpe—How historical errors arise—How it came to be thought that Fénelon might be made a tool—Apotheoses—*Telemaachus*—What the eighteenth century saw in it—Was it really admired?—VIII.—The Duke of Burgundy—What would he have been had he lived?—What would his preceptor have been, when he had become his minister?—A saying of the Abbé Terrason—A saying of Louis XIV.—Vagueness and dangers—Neither master nor pupil sincerely praised.—IX.—Same tactics at the death of the son of Louis XV.—He had hated the philosophers—The clergy made of him a saint—The philosophers improve on this—Thomas—Judgments of Grimm and Diderot on his exaggerations—

The prince travestied into a friend of new ideas—Useless protestations of the clergy—Piron become a devotee, makes himself their organ, and only becomes ridiculous.

X.—Influence of Massillon—Was Voltaire sincere in praising him?—Why was he praised?—*Le Petit Carême*—Little Christianity but much *philosophy*—It was made the *beau idéal* of Christian eloquence—Massillon's name becomes a weapon in the hands of the enemies of religion.

I.—THE time, therefore, was now gone by when the good Abbé de Dangeau, on the news of the disasters of Blenheim and Ramillies, said, as he affectionately laid his hand on his old bureau, "Come what may, I have safe here three thousand verbs, all rightly conjugated!"

The time had gone by when Boileau brought his friends together to submit to them a phrase or a word; to ask of them a rhyme which for a week, mayhap for a fortnight, he had been calling for in vain from the echoes of his garden.

One loves, nevertheless, on arriving at the eighteenth century, to give a last look to those lives, so uniform, so simple, so artless; and sometimes, from their very artlessness, so sublime. See what Fontenelle relates to us in his *Eloges*, of those beautiful lives spent between work and God.

Look, for example, at Morin, the botanist, "going to bed at seven o'clock at night all the year round, and rising at two in the morning. He spent three hours in prayer. Between five and six in summer, and in winter between six and seven, he went to the Hôtel-Dieu, and most frequently heard mass at Notre-Dame. On coming back, he read the Holy Scriptures, and dined at eleven o'clock. He next went to the Royal Garden, and remained in fine weather till two, examining new plants, and satisfying his first and strongest passion. After that, he shut himself up at home, unless he happened to have some poor people to visit." What a peaceful life! Would not one say he was entering one of those silent libraries on the very threshold of which one is tempted to uncover and almost to kneel?

Look again, for example, at the great Cassini, "whose mind was equal, tranquil, exempt from those vain inquietudes and those senseless agitations, which of all maladies are the most doleful and the most incurable. A great fund of religion, and, what is still more, of the practice of religion, aided much this perpetual calm. The heavens, which declare the glory of their Creator, had never spoken to any one more than to him, and never with more persuasion." Let us not forget that it is Fontenelle that speaks amid the din of the last century. But he had seen the seventeenth, and *transfuge* as he was, he reserved for it the love one feels for his mother-country after leaving it.

D'Alembert, therefore, is in error when he says, in his *Essay on Men of Letters*, that "in England people were content with Newton's being the greatest genius of his age; in France, one would have wished him also to be amiable." In France, under Louis XIV., Newton might not have been *amiable*, and yet lost nothing by not being so.

This blessed calm enjoyed by the friends of science, was enjoyed also by almost all the friends of letters, alike the humblest and the most illustrious. See the two Corneilles, lodged the one above the other, and asking one another for words and verses through a hole opened in the ceiling. See the house-keeping of Racine, living with his wife, who never wished to read a single verse of his, and his sons, whom he trembles to behold entering the thorny paths of Parnassus; "for," said he, "never had the highest praises given him so much pleasure as the slightest criticism had given him pain." The purer and the calmer a piece of water, the less it takes to ruffle it; but was not God always there?

At these petty disappointments of the coryphæuses of a great age you may laugh, perhaps; then you repent of having laughed, and it is not without a certain emotion that you

peruse the details of their cares, their joys, and the obscure turns of fortune that sufficed for their activity. Letters, the *belles-lettres*—for that was not only the word, but the idea and the sentiment of those times;—the *belles-lettres*, we say, were then not a means but an end. They were loved, they were cultivated for their own sakes. It never entered the head of any one that they ought to serve as the vehicle, as we should now say, of political or social ideas, or even of philosophical opinions. At best, a vague moral mission was given them; they should tend, it was said, to make virtue amiable and vice hated. With this exception, people wrote for the sake of writing; and if a man had the luck to write well, the glory of having written well was a recompense beyond which a literary man desired nothing, nay, even perceived nothing.

II.—Does this mean, that here, according to us, is the ideal perfection of the man of letters, and that, while we fondly paint this peaceful past, we would have the literary men of our own day to return to it?

No. It is one thing to envy the obscure calm which literature could enjoy even in the midst of its glory, another to wish it at present such a peace as would only be a state of listlessness—a felicity which it could not acquire at less than the loss of its whole influence in the world. The men may have been admirable, but the system was false. To write for writing's sake, to make fine verses merely for the sake of making fine verses, to publish books, even good books, in the sole view of showing that one could write them, or of procuring for one's-self the satisfaction of having written them—this were strangely to restrict the mission of the mind and of the pen. Literature, no doubt, is an art; but it ought not to be only an art. Let us, then, heartily forgive the men of the seventeenth century for having understood it to be no

more; but let us comprehend, that a time behoved to come when there would be a different understanding on the subject.

We must not, then, reproach the eighteenth century with having given, or rather with having restored to literature the function which she could claim as her right. She had the capacity, and it was her duty to become a power. Inverting what we have said of the preceding century, we approve the system; it is the men that we have too often to blame.

Moreover, more than one author was found, in the midst of this new life, to look with regret on the peace and obscurity of the old. "Not," says d'Alembert himself,\* "that intercourse with the world is not necessary to men of letters, those especially who write to please their age, or to paint it; but this intercourse, having become general and indiscriminate, is for them at the present day what the discovery of the New World has been to Europe. It is doubtful how far it has done more good than harm." But d'Alembert was not in a condition rightly to comprehend what kind of evil this change had produced in the men of letters. We see him elsewhere himself congratulate them on what was really least desirable in their new position—cheap praise and the acquisition of influence on every attack made on things established. "The great dread us," said Duclos, "as robbers dread the street lamps at night."

III.—Literature, accordingly, ceased to be an end, but became a means. "In a literary success, what was mainly sought was powerful action, or some good effect. The public, driven by authors into this course, drove them into it in its turn, and would allow them neither turn nor halt. Voltaire, born with fine taste, and an artist by nature, needed all

\* *Eloge on the Abbé Terrasson.*



the power which his services had conferred upon him—for many were the services required of literature—in order to preserve for art, as art, some share in the public attention.”\* Others thought only, on the contrary, of establishing and extolling the new priesthood: “I love to picture to myself,” said Thomas, “the man of letters meditating in his solitary cabinet. His country is at his side; justice and humanity stand before him; he is surrounded by the images of the wretched; he is agitated with pity, and tears flow from his eyes. . . . Then he perceives at a distance the powerful and the rich; he envies them the privilege they enjoy of mitigating the woes of this earth. ‘And for me,’ he says, ‘I have nothing for their comfort; I have nothing but my thoughts. Ah! let me at least make that gift useful to the unhappy.’ . . . Anon his ideas crowd upon him, and his soul expands outwardly.” Voltaire was not far wrong when he used to say that people should no longer speak of a *galimatias*, but of a *galithomas*.

Thus we find that writing came to be pursued no more for writing’s sake, but for promoting the progress of an idea; what was now wanted was not readers, but adepts. Here and there, indeed, a rhymster would appear who merely rhymed, or a learned man who never got beyond his books. Voltaire himself went off on a fine day to shut himself up at Sénonès among the folios of Dom Calmet. But the scribbling crew was to be found in the drawing-rooms, in the theatres, wherever, in short, there was a tribune to occupy, anywhere—no offence to M. Thomas—except in the gloom of their library. The mathematician rose to influence by dint of speaking as well as cyphering; and if an astronomer chanced to fall into a well, it was not owing to his not having an eye open to the things of this lower world.

\* Vinet.

Those even who personally had no taste for this ambitious and noisy career, you find compelled, in spite of themselves, to exercise their several shares of royalty. These last became all the more powerful, the more they renounced that power. Molière has exhibited the physician in spite of himself. Had he lived a century later, he might have given us the philosopher in spite of himself, the regenerator and the revolutionist in spite of himself.

IV.—Among the honourable men who, zealous partisans of old manners, are found to have aided the march of new ideas, there is one in particular who may be taken advantage of for studying this persistence on the part of an age in laying hold of a man, and, will he nill he, thrusting into his hands a sceptre which he never coveted. This was Rollin, *good Rollin*, as we say, and as was said even then.

Rollin was the son of a cutler. This circumstance, forgotten during three quarters of his life, from his never having been seen either to blush for it or to boast of it, was laid hold of towards 1725. But this was done, not, as one might be apt to think, in order to have occasion to praise the man, by contrasting his present glory with the obscurity of his birth. It was felt that he had no need of this eulogium, which, besides, was common enough, trivial enough. It was done mainly as a means of protesting against the ordinary prerogatives of birth and rank. The name of one of the humblest of men was thus to grace the flag of plebeian pride in its revolt against patrician pride. This obscurity of birth, which was turned to his credit, could be turned to a very different account in the case of one whom people had no hopes of making a party tool. Look at Rousseau the poet. Because he could not be transformed into a champion of the new ideas, he was twitted to his very death with being the son of a shoe-

maker. Only to give a colour to the reproach, it was alleged that he had disowned his father.

Now, what were Rollin's titles to the respect that was professed for him? There was nothing in his life, his labours, or his manners, which did not rather isolate him from his cotemporaries than attach him to them. He was known to be profoundly religious, and infidelity had become almost universal. He had been heard delivering lectures with talent, and with a certain charm, but these lectures were on ancient authors, now beginning to be very little cared for. He made fine verses, but these were in Latin. He delivered some fine harangues, but these, too, were in Latin, and of no interest, besides, in the questions of the day. At the age of sixty, in fine, he wrote in French; but his *Treatise on Studies* still inculcated nothing but religion, morals, Homer, Virgil, and the Bible. Yes; but it was easy to make him out, under these austere outward forms, to be a man of opposition, and a man of the movement. This was what was wanted, and this was the reason for adopting him.

A man of opposition: it was not assuredly that he had been so in the sense in which other people began to be so; but all the oppositions are sisters, and it is there chiefly that it may be said that extremes meet.

He had never attacked religion; but, as a Jansenist, he had had to struggle against the Church and against the royal authority. He had received that baptism of persecution which is always enough, at the time of a crisis, to recommend a man. He had presented himself to it with that eager grace which the common people never fail to applaud.

As a professor, he had preached the old rules, but with an independence of attitude, and a hardihood of taste, which amounted to a satire on pedants. As Rector of the University, he had upheld, when necessary, antiquated privileges; but

even this had brought him into conflict with other authorities, and it was not forgotten that he had braved the archbishop.

A man of the movement: no more was he this, we need not say, after the fashion of the innovators of his time; but his love for the past enhanced the value of the pledges which he had given, without desiring it, to the present and to the future.

Accordingly, he who was better acquainted with Latin than any one else, had remonstrated against the too constant use of that tongue in the University teaching. This attack, novel and bold in itself, had consequences infinitely more remote. When form and substance have been associated together for ages, you cannot shake the one without affecting the other. To dethrone the Latin tongue, was to prepare the downfall of all that was taught in Latin. He who, as Professor of Eloquence, had been constituted the official representative of Quintilian and Aristotle, openly inculcated that genius and taste were to be put above all the rules. Here, again, there was a cry of freedom far more powerful than he himself believed.

This same instinct had led him to select the whole of the quotations which he required, whether in his oral lectures or in his *Treatise on Studies*, from all the finest discourses and patriotic traits to be found in the remains of antiquity. He thought he had never spoken but as a rhetorician; but people began, though as unconscious of it as himself, to listen to him as a tribune.

V.—Such, then, was the part of which he found himself in possession, when, encouraged by the success of his *Treatise on Studies*, he undertook, at the age of seventy, the vast historical work which was to occupy him till his death.

From 1730 to 1741, he published, in eighteen large vo-

lumes, first his *Ancient History*, and then his *Roman History*, which death prevented him from finishing. But from the publication of the first volume, and even before that, on the simple announcement of his work, he could enjoy the glory it conferred, and, more astonished than any one else, asked himself how he happened to meet with such brilliant success.

That success was great, and, in fact, universal and unexampled. When Richardson, twenty years afterwards, came to publish, by little and little, the volumes of his *Clarissa*, there were persons who waited for them with the most painful anxiety; but Rollin's work was not a romance. What he was to say in his next volume one had only to look for, without waiting, in the authors from which all that he had already published had been taken. But no. The public redoubled their impatience. It was of him and him only they would hold that ancient baggage, the property, for almost two thousand years, of any one that could read. That witty and sneering generation was in his presence like the babe that will take nothing and taste nothing except from the hands of its nurse.

Can we say that he at least imparted a fresh grace to those old things, by the novelty of the forms in which he presented them, or by the interest and depth of his reflections? Not at all. It is an old man's narrative, flowing but inanimate, purely but withal tediously written. No flashes of genius; no wit; of that wit, at least, which people desired to have everywhere, not a whit more. Much good sense, but very commonplace; sometimes, indeed, it is rather simplicity than good sense; and were it not for the name of the author, one would laugh at those childish reflections, and ask whether it was worth the pains to write them. In certain places, it is true, you will find some considerations more original, and some ideas more profound; but take care: it is Bossuet you are

reading. The author had intimated, that whatever of the beautiful and the good he might meet with on his way, he would turn to account, and so we find him pillaging the moderns with as little scruple as he copies from the ancients.

And how does he copy these last? With the simplicity of a schoolboy, who believes everything and repeats everything, even what is absurd. But though wanting as a critic, he may at least have erudition? No more has he that. He had read the principal historians only; the more recondite sources were generally unknown to him. He seems to have seen nothing to suggest a doubt to his mind about the seven kings of Rome and their fabulous history; he believes in Livy even where opposed by Pliny and Polybius. For the rest, he has no tinge of antiquity in his colouring. Persians, Medes, Greeks, Romans, all become Frenchmen under his pen; and *the gentlemen of Athens* would have stared at this style, used by a man who nevertheless was well versed in Greek.

VI.—Such, then, were the contents of those huge volumes which excited not only the interest, but the curiosity, and almost the enthusiasm of Europe.

Among these faults, it is true, there was one which could not at that time be perceived. Historical criticism was then almost unknown. People were fonder of facts, even when doubtful, than of research and scepticism.\* The absence of antique colouring was not generally felt, for people had become habituated, at the theatre, to listen to nobody but moderns, and this perpetual anachronism, sanctified, in some sort, by the genius of Racine, had passed as it were into men's manners. All the ultra-French refinements that Racine had introduced into his Greek imitations, were preserved by Brumoy in a

\* A great doubter, Chesterfield, is quite as unsuspecting as Rollin on the history of early times in Rome. See his *Letters to his Son*.

prose translation, where there was nothing to prevent his remaining faithful to the original.\*

But although it should be established that Rollin had not fallen, considering the times, into any serious fault, the question still remains: How, then, did he draw to himself the suffrages of such an age? People fancy they have fully answered it by saying with Montesquieu, "It is heart speaking to heart." But where was the heart of the eighteenth century? In the head; whereas Rollin had kept his in his breast.

Let us return to our own explanation; it is the only one possible. He was neither liked nor listened to for his own sake, but for the sake of that which he sheltered, unwittingly, behind his own respectable name and feeble works. He thought it was ancient liberty only that he admired, and he became one of the apostles of that modern liberty which resembled it only in name. He thought he was praising only heroic actions, and among these there was more than one crime, the return of which was facilitated by the effect of his unsuspecting readiness to eulogize them.

Thus it was that the man who seemed the least fitted to belong to the eighteenth century, not only belonged to it, but became, through the force of circumstances, one of its foremost promoters. We might name other men that were no better fitted fundamentally for this part than he, and who yet in various degrees filled it. We might mention Vertot with his drowsy *Revolutions*, and d'Aguesseau with his serious *Discourses*. The former of these taught, unintentionally, what a revolted population could do; the latter taught men, under an absolute monarch, to lisp the language of the free. He called the Parliament the *senate*, and the councillors *senators*; he opened the way to declamations on the dignity of man, and the rights of virtue. To this, much more than even to his

\* His *Théâtre des Grecs* is of date, 1730.

virtue, we must attribute the praises with which we see him overwhelmed by the freethinkers who came after him. In general, when you see a party doing homage to a man who does not belong to it, you should not be in haste to suppose that it is from a sense of justice; you should begin by inquiring whether it may not be from interest.

VII.—But it was not the living alone that were borne along, in spite of their convictions to the contrary, by this rising tide of the eighteenth century. The very dead themselves, after being more or less travestied, became auxiliaries to the movement.

Here, again, we might quote many names. Let us take but one, that of Fénelon, and see what has been made of it.

Fénelon had, under the pens of unbelievers, become one of that sort of Christians who are imagined for the purpose of battering down Christianity, men strong in point of morals, very plastic in point of doctrine, worshippers of the human virtues, virtuous of course, but above all things charitable, tolerant even towards vice, Christians, in fine, in everything but faith. "What was religion in his view?" we find Maury asking himself, in 1771.\* "A sublime philosophy which demonstrates the order and the unity of nature, and explains the enigma of the human heart, which, without it, is incomprehensible; the most powerful motive leading man to good, seeing faith places him constantly before the eye of the Divinity, and acts upon the will with as much sovereign power as it exercises over the thoughts; a supplement of the conscience, which commands, fortifies, and perfects all the virtues—establishes new bonds of good-will on the new relations of humanity—shows us, in the poor, creditors and judges; in our enemies, brethren; in the Supreme Being, a Father; the reli-

\* *Eloge de Fénelon.*



gion of the heart, virtue in action, the finest of all the codes of morality, and one whose every precept is a blessing from heaven. Such was Christianity in the eyes of Fénelon."

Beneath these big words, and all this Christian varnish, what do we really have? Evidently the portrait of a deist. The whole discourse is in that tone. And from what a priest ventured to say, we may judge of what was said by those who had not the same appearances to preserve. The discourse of La Harpe, presented to the Academy in competition with that of Maury, is still less Christian.

Now, where was this Fénelon ever seen? Not certainly in the writings of the real Fénelon; and no more either in his life. But who dreamt of going back to these? What was wanted was a *philosophical* Fénelon; and he was assumed to be what the philosophers made him.

Are we to be understood as saying that these last really said to each other: "We must have him after such a fashion; let us then make him so. Let us tell a lie. Something will always remain!"

Such is not the origin of the errors of history. That origin will always be found in the spirit and in the wants of the time. Dishonesty does not come till afterwards.

But Fénelon, like Rollin, had been a man of opposition. In spite of his charity, or, if you will, because of his charity, throughout his whole life, he had had struggles to sustain.

Dating from the very first of his writings, we behold him at war with all the preachers of his time, including Bourdaloue, and perhaps even Bossuet. He would have no art in the pulpit, and traced a model which all his charity does not prevent from being almost a satire.

In his *Treatise on the Education of Daughters*, he had at every step to combat one or other of the false methods then prevailing in education. As preceptor of the Duke of Bur-

gandy, he made his pupil such a prince as had never been seen before.

As an archbishop, in fine, one would say that he had attached himself by preference to the virtues which formed the severest critique on his colleagues. We would not say that this was from design on his part; we say that his life, designedly employed for this purpose, became a weapon in the hands of the enemies of the clergy, and that thus people came to make his doctrines, or what were supposed to have been his doctrines, an arm against religion.

His very virtues served only to the deification of man. "Should a demand," says Maury,\* "be one day made on the earth, for the virtues in which it might truly glory, the human race would produce, as the highest of its titles, the soul of Fénelon." "His *Treatise on the Existence of God*," said La Harpe, "comprised in itself all the proofs on that point, but the best of these was the author himself." With what horror would not Fénelon have repelled such eulogies! In general, when the persons spoken of were such as Christianity could claim, care was taken—and the habit has not been lost—to praise in them those merits only which were more or less independent of faith; such as courage, benevolence, devotedness. It was the infidels, for example, who made the reputation of Belzunce, Bishop of Marseilles. He was a man empty enough, superstitious, hot-headed;† but his beautiful conduct during the plague furnished ample scope for fine phrases on humanity and virtue. He was placed on the altar, side by side with Fénelon, tending the wounded at Malplaquet. The hint for this had been given by two verses of Pope.‡

What went farthest to aggrandize Fénelon in the eyes of the thinkers of this infidel school, was evidently his *Tele-machus*, but only after being interpreted and travestied accord-

\* *Eloge de Fénelon*.

† See Lemontey, *Histoire de la Régence*.

‡ *Essay on Man*.

ing to the ideas of the times. It were a great mistake, in fact, to figure to ourselves the eighteenth century admiring *Telemachus*, as we admire it at the present day. Possibly, at the death of Louis XIV., people may have really been under some illusion as to the effects to be expected from that book. "*Telemachus* is printed, and a golden age is expected from it," wrote Madame de Caylus to Madame de Maintenon, during the first months of the Regency. But the illusion was to last but a short time. People thought they had found a saviour; they found themselves still before a book. Now, those pure and simple forms, that austere elegance, that exquisite sense of the Greek beauties, that harmonious mingling of Christian sentiments with antique forms, all this was little of a nature to please the men of that time. The true merit of the work, in their eyes almost its only merit, was the part it had played under Louis XIV., and that which it might still be made to play, not in politics only, as then, but in religion and in morals. Voltaire, in his more candid moments, lets it be sufficiently seen that in reality he made very little account of it; but no sooner did an occasion appear for deifying the author, in order, under shelter of his name, to attack some portion of the ancient edifice, and he will be found the first to express nothing but admiration. His disciples, as was ever the case, went farther still, and it is no fault of theirs if Fénelon be not regarded universally as a martyr of philosophy, an infidel, or not much short of one.

VIII.—With this aptitude for fashioning, after its own image, the men whose names might be made to serve its purposes, this usurping literature sometimes looked about for such men beyond the literary world, and even on the steps of the throne.

Would the pupil of Fénelon, the Duke of Burgundy, have

made good his promises? Or, for this rather is the question, did he really promise all that he was represented to have promised?

"I have but one wish for you," said a wise man once to the heir of a throne; "it is, that you may die before you have reigned."

Such, indeed, and with a single eye to the interests of their glory, is the most desirable destiny for the sons of kings. There have been few so bad as not to have been made, by the popular imagination at their death, the heroes of a golden age, looked forward to as certain, but which has vanished along with them.

This age of gold, accordingly, had been thought to be harbingered by the virtues of the Duke of Burgundy. That he meant well is incontestable, and Fénelon would have been his minister. Had they, then, between them, the qualities requisite for the government of a great country? One may be allowed to doubt this. Abbé Terrasson's saying has often been repeated: "If human felicity could spring from any poem, it would spring from the *Telemachus*." It is a fine compliment, but is it not also somewhat of an epigram? Nothing more easy than to make the happiness of mankind in a poem; and, in general, on paper. Louis XIV., whom we must admit, notwithstanding the wrongs and the faults he committed, to have had great tact in government, called Fénelon "a chimerical genius." We would ask those who may be tempted to reclaim against this judgment, so much criticized in the eighteenth century, if they would undertake to find in *Telemachus* many political counsels, of which the most virtuous of kings could wisely attempt the execution. Without speaking of the Twelfth Book,\* which our socialists would subscribe, and which, nevertheless, is the most important in this respect—

\* The advice given to Idomeneus on the organization of his new kingdom.


what vagueness, what forgetfulness, not to say ignorance, of what men and nations really are ! what perpetual confusion between laws and manners—between what is, and what is not, within the province of government ! Fénelon's pupil had the virtues of an honest man. Would he have been more fortunate than Louis XVI., who had those virtues also, and who desired to have no other ?

This, at least, is certain, that virtues of that sort do not explain the eulogiums bestowed on the Duke of Burgundy by the men of the last century. His over-scrupulous piety, for which Fénelon himself had at last to reprove him, could only provoke their pity ; his plans, altogether fraternal, were not the less based on a principle of absolute authority, which principle was not wanted.

Here again, consequently, we see tactics, and nothing but tactics. The reputation of the Duke of Burgundy was but a citadel, raised up between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, between Louis XIV. and Louis XV., for the purpose of attacking both the past and the present, and of covering the road that led to the future.

IX.—This manœuvre was repeated at the death of the son even of Louis XV., and that with still more audacity.

It was notorious, in fact, that that prince had a horror for philosophers. It was he who denounced to the king the book published by Helvetius, though received at first by the Court as a good book, or at least as not dangerous ; and he it was who had called for the suspension of the *Encyclopédie*. If, on the one hand, he professed humane and wise principles on the duties of kings, he at the same time announced it as his intention to prosecute to the last extremity the enemies of religion and of the throne. Moreover, he loved the Jesuits ; nay, he openly defended them. No one could doubt that his



succession to the crown would prove their resurrection in France. Accordingly, after having made a hero of him during his life, the clergy found nothing more indispensable at his death than forthwith to proclaim him a saint. All pulpits throughout the kingdom resounded with his praises. At the risk of condemning the father, who continued to grovel in his old vices, men raised altars to the virtues of the son.

The philosophical phalanx was for a moment on the point of abandoning him to the incense of the priests; but this, it was thought, would be weakness, and so they set themselves to outdo what was done by the clergy. It was a position to be occupied, and they did occupy it. It was a false position, but for their purpose a good one; and this was enough to keep them from recoiling from it. Behind such a rampart, what needed any one fear? Who would dare to rise against men who were dissolved in tears for the son of their king? None could forbid their being allowed to speak; and so, as they proceed, they will shelter behind his name all the bold things, political or otherwise, which they durst not announce on their own authority.

This they actually did, and the saint of the Jesuits accordingly became the saint of the philosophers.

It was Thomas, the author of so many *éloges*, the Bossuet of the *Encyclopédie*, who installed himself priest of the new worship. But he went so far as to be accused in the philosophical world, of having unmasked the batteries a little. "M. Thomas," wrote Grimm,\* "has endeavoured, under the features of the late dauphin, to portray the image of an accomplished prince. Such, then, is the aim of his discourse; but by over-doing the picture, he has missed his aim. If M. Thomas honestly believes that the dauphin possessed

\* *Correspondence*, 1766.

one-fourth of the good qualities he attributes to him, most assuredly he is not descended from the apostle Thomas." Diderot, more outspoken than the rest, does not jest; he is indignant. "If the dauphin," he writes, "deserved the hundredth part of the praises lavished on him by M. Thomas, who is there that ever resembled him? Who is there who ever will resemble him? Does any one believe that a father, who apparently knew his son, can approve of a mass of hyperboles, the falsehood of which he could not possibly dissemble? What can we expect him to think of letters, and those who cultivate them, when one of the honestest among us can get himself to lie so impudently to a whole nation? And his sisters? And his wife? As for his valets, they will laugh at it."\*

But these observations, which were allowed to pass among friends, made no change on the public testimonies. The dauphin became more and more idealized, and people came insensibly to make him not only a partisan of liberalism in politics, but almost a freethinker in everything else. On the strength of a jest that escaped from him, at the expense of that poor creature, Pompignan, the butt of Voltaire, there was erected a whole scaffolding of insinuations against his faith. Men would have it that he fed his mind in secret with the books he condemned in public. The work he had chiefly read, it was said, in his last illness, was Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding*. His reputation was thus made complete; thus it became, in the hands of the lords and masters of public opinion, a new instrument suited to their wishes. In vain did the clergy protest; in vain did old Piron,† who had

\* Louis XV. himself, in a kind of funeral oration made on him by Voltaire, in 1775, was elevated into a friend of the philosophers. He no longer lived to reclaim, and Louis XVI. could allow himself to be caught by it. It was enough that people affirmed the thing.

† *The late Prince-Dauphin to the Nation in mourning for six months.* It was ludicrously flat. "Sing," says the dauphin to the French—

become a devotee, make the defunct express himself in bad verses, but in a manner more in accordance with his well-known sentiments. The movement had fairly commenced.

X.—But the author who contributed most to bring down declamations upon princes—durst we venture to say it?—was Massillon.

Is it true that Voltaire looked on him as the model of prose writers? Is it true that the *Petit Carême* was to be seen continually, side by side with the *Athalie* of Racine, on Voltaire's table?

Voltaire said so; d'Alembert has repeated it; Europe has believed it. Shall we believe it? It would not perhaps be difficult to show that Massillon's good qualities were little of a nature to obtain for him Voltaire's admiration, and that his faults, on the other hand, could not have escaped the eye of such a judge.

Even although this admiration were manifestly sincere, still there would be occasion for inquiring into the causes of it. Why did Voltaire, why did the infidel school, cry up Massillon?

Let us open that *Petit Carême* which Voltaire had, or which he had not, on his table, and you will not be long in understanding why he pretended to prize it so much.

A book may be a bad book in two different ways; bad in

“Sing ye another Louis Twelve in Louis called Fifteen,  
And love his blood, my sisters fair, my wife, too, and the queen—  
My wife that now my widow is, in whom I live once more,  
Through children three that she to me in our brief wedlock bore.”

He calls on the country to purge itself

“Of those who order do despise, and scorn all sacred things,  
Disturbers of the public peace, whose pride unpunish'd brings,  
Broad-cast o'er all your fields to sow, infinity of tares,” &c.

Grimm said that if such verses were made in Paradise, M. Piron would certainly take precedence there of M. Voltaire.



itself—which is certainly not the case in this instance—bad as lending itself to bad consequences; and who will deny that the *Petit Carême* lent itself superabundantly to these?

Two things had at once procured for these discourses a popularity which sermons, as sermons, never could look for.

First of all, they have little or none of the pith of Christianity. They are sermons that are as little sermons as possible. We have an exhibition of pure and gentle morality; still it is morality, and it is not faith.

In the second place, we have philosophy in abundance; good and wise philosophy, it is true, but feeble withal, and too susceptible of being easily turned to account of the ideas, the interests, and the passions of the epoch.

It had been laid hold of accordingly. The *Petit Carême* had been made the gospel of that new religion which was not yet the Deism of a later period, but which was still less the Christianity of the preceding century. While waiting till they ceased to be Christians at all, people abandoned themselves to the pleasure of being so at little expense. The preachers had yielded to the torrent. The perfection of Christian eloquence was made to lie in composing sermons with nothing Christian in them but the text. And Massillon himself, in his Clermont retreat, spent the last twenty years of his life in polishing, according to the taste of the day, the finest specimens of his no longer Christian eloquence.

In weakening the foundations of the altar he had not spared those of the throne; those—for we are far from restricting the observation to the monarchical form—those, we say, of authority in general. The *Petit Carême* teems with things which might not seem dangerous in times of profound peace and settled obedience, but which were capable of coming in aid afterwards of all revolutions.

Thus, while advantage was taken of Fénelon to attack

government in its vices, Massillon was taken advantage of for the purpose of undermining it in its principles. While the virtues of the one were transformed into arguments against Christianity, the morality of the other, too independent of faith, came in aid of the pretentious apostles of virtue without religion. With the name of Fénelon, in a word, the official representatives of Christianity were attacked; with that of Massillon, it was deprived of its Divine character, and it ceased to be more than a mere morality.

## CHAPTER II.

- I.—Progress of error—How people become used to it—The nineteenth century, in this respect, gives us too clear an insight into the eighteenth—There is one difference which does us no honour.
- II.—How adepts were recruited—Voltaire the centre of attraction—He makes himself all things to all men—His eulogies to Father Vionnet, to Lemierre, to Dubelloy, and to Dom Calmet—What was implied in the title of a great man—Montesquieu and the Abbé Dubos—Gélotte—Trochin—Vauvenargues—Thomas—A woman a great man—Variety in the forms of eulogies—Condorcet—Marmontel—D'Alembert—Diderot—Turenne—Gold becomes genius—Helvetius a poet.
- III.—The King of Prussia—More modest, and a better writer than is believed at the present day—Voltaire at his feet—A complete course of the art of praising—The two circles—The vapours and the dew.—IV.—The king at the feet of Voltaire—His incense a little heavy—Specimens of it.
- V.—Equality begins to be established betwixt the sceptre and the pen—Those who submit to it concur towards it as much as those who call for it—Inconsistencies of all kinds—The *citizens*—Despotism and liberalism—Frederick—Catherine II.—Louis XV.—The *Xerxes* of Crébillon—Leblanc's *Manco-Capac*—The *Encyclopédie* and Malesherbies—General relaxation—Piron and his pension—Montesquieu and the Academy—Montesquieu and the Pope—Permission to eat meat on fast-days—Voltaire and the Capuchins of Gex—Voltaire and the relics—To caress and fondle the *Wretch*—The thunders dare no longer sleep—Marmontel at the Bastille—The two dinners.

MEETING with hardly any obstacle, these opinions made rapid progress. They were embraced by many of the friends of religion without hesitation, such persons imagining that here, at length, a common ground might be reached where all the world would be of one mind. Man's deplorable faculty of familiarizing himself by custom with false views, like all his other faculties, acquires strength from exercise; and there are times when one would think the very atmosphere favours its development. The tendency we speak of manifests itself

at such times, not only in the hardihood with which people are found to propose and to take advantage of what they are aware is not the truth, but also in the indulgence accorded to falsehood by men who would be shocked at telling lies themselves.

It is lamentably evident that this fatal atmosphere prevails in our own day. The more we see truth made the grand object of research in history and the sciences—for it were unjust to the age in which we live to deny that in these departments it shows a seriousness never known before—the more do we see a tendency in everything else to make use of falsehood for one's own purposes. The lessons of experience, those of plain good sense, are all on the first occasion counted as nothing. Whoever wants dupes is sure to find them. Whoever may attack an army, whoever may make promises to adepts; if a man makes bold to inquire whether the attacks are just, whether the promises can ever be realized, he is denounced as a foe to progress, liberty, and enlightenment.

We are but too apt, therefore, to form our ideas of the whims of a century ago according to what we see in our own day. Some of these caprices have changed their objects, others only their forms. At bottom we see the same tendency to pay more deference to the merest fool that undermines than to the man of highest intelligence who speaks of building up. Whoever has an idea, however absurd, that chimes in with the forward movement of the day is admitted to the rights of citizenship. In the former period, and here lies the only difference, such a man was made a philosopher.

Yet there is this farther difference, and it is one that does little honour to our intelligence, that our predecessors had experienced none of those rude trials which ought to have made us wiser than they. The house seemed then to stand so firm that none suspected danger in taking out a stone from

it here and there ; the vessel was of such ample dimensions that every one proceeded to make a hole for himself in it, without the slightest apprehension that this would end in sending it to the bottom. People amused themselves with blowing upon the waves, never dreaming that their united efforts would at last produce a hurricane. "I do not believe that any people, in any age, ever enjoyed such complete repose as the inhabitants of France betwixt 1715 and 1785. In point of fact, people whisked about on a volcano, but the volcano slumbered, and though the soil may have begun to be a little hot, it was not enough to scorch the soles of their feet. Then what can be imagined more delicious than to dwell on a volcanic soil, as long as the volcano remains asleep? In a balmy atmosphere, beneath an azure sky, people naturally dance, and sing, and drink *Lachryma Christi*."\* Accordingly, it was not only the general sense of security that aided the progress of the philosophers by veiling the dangerous side of their doctrines ; it was that internal fever also, that latent volcanic heat, which, if we may use the expression, favoured the vegetation of ideas, and changed men in spite of themselves.

II.—But what a curious history is that of the cajoleries lavished on all, little men or great men, whom it was thought of consequence to enlist under the banners of the new school, or to keep them there !

It was in this especially—in the art of enveloping and engrossing whatever seemed likely to suit his purposes—that Voltaire had no equal. He was the grand recruiting sergeant of his age ; and, still keeping this point of view, he is its most complete representative, for in him we see as it were incarnated, in some sort, that invincible attraction which was in

\* Duval, *Souvenirs de la Terreur*.

the end to bring and bind together so many contemporary individualities:

See, first of all, how he made himself all things to all men. Where shall we find a part too humble for his not being ready to accept it for the benefit of the crusade? If he compelled a pope to praise him for one of his tragedies, he himself had eulogiums—and such eulogiums!—to bestow on an obscure Jesuit who had sent him one. To Father Vionnet he wrote, “You are rather Crebillon’s enemy than mine. You have done more damage to his *Xerxes* than I have done to his *Semiramis*.” Such is the tone in which we find him depreciating all the pieces for which people did him homage; while he hailed, as his fortunate successors at the court of Thalia and Melpomene, all authors that were not at open war with him.

During his last visit to Paris, Lemierre and Dubelloy called on him. “What consoles me in the prospect of death,” said he, “is the thought that I shall leave behind MM. Dubelloy and Lemierre.” So off they went, both mighty proud, yet each with no less mighty a contempt for the other. “Poor Dubelloy!” Lemierre would say, “he did not see in the least that Voltaire was laughing at him.” “That poor fellow Lemierre!” the other would say, “he has taken it into his head that Voltaire was in earnest.”

Thus was it with all the praises lavished by him with a munificence that ought to have made them suspicious to the least humble. Every one would have it, that, himself excepted, Voltaire laughed at all others; each preserved, as a possession of inestimable value, the writ conferring immortality bestowed by his hands. I would not say but that Dom Calmet, the good and grave Dom Calmet, did not, in the solitude of his cloister, peruse at times, with some risings of pride, such lines as the following :\*—“I should like, sir, above all

\* Feb. 1748.

things, to go and spend some weeks in your company and that of your books. I should not like to have to reproach myself with having been so near you, and yet not to have had the honour of seeing you. I would fain take lessons with the man to whose books I owe what I am, and draw directly from the fountainhead. I prefer retirement to the Court, and *great men to kings.*"

It is true, that the title of great man was then lavished with a liberality which people have the good sense in our day to discontinue. Hardly any now but the learned, and of these but one class, the learned in philology, gratify each other reciprocally in this way; nay, even then it is done only in Latin, and in prefaces which nobody reads. But at that time it was done in French, in private letters as well as in public discourses; in short, it was on all occasions that people called themselves great men, and passed the censer on from one to the other. "If that great man has made a mistake," says Montesquieu, at the close of one of the books of his *Spirit of Laws*, "what have I not cause to apprehend!" And who was this *great man* whom Montesquieu dared not hope to equal? Why, the Abbé Dubos, whom Montesquieu himself, in the preceding pages, had treated cavalierly enough. Did the public singer, Geliotte, on becoming old, fall through his part at the Court theatre? "It was remarked," said Bachaumont,\* "that he showed only the remains of the great man."

Voltaire, to whom this title was most generally accorded, was also the most lavish in bestowing it on others. With it he paid his physician Tronchin, who, it is true, deserved it better than most men. He wrote to Vauvenargues:† "This

\* *Mémoires Secrets*. 1762.

† 1746.—Vauvenargues died the following year. There is reason to doubt whether in spite of Voltaire's cajolery, he remained his friend to the last.

age did not deserve you ; but so it is that it possesses you, and I bless nature. I said a year ago that you are a great man." He wrote to Thomas : " You are made to celebrate great men. It is your vocation to portray your fellows." And when he loses Madame Chatelet, his female friend, as he could not, in good French, call her *grande femme*,\* it is still *grand homme*, great man, that we find him calling her when, in writing to the King of Prussia,† he says, " I have lost a friend of five-and-twenty years' standing, a great man, who had but the one fault of being a woman."

Great is the variety, besides, as must have been already seen from these few specimens, in the forms which he gave to this hackneyed compliment. Does Condorcet's *Pascal* come to hand, that is to say, the antichristian notes with which Condorcet enriched his new edition of *Pascal*?—" I have read," said he, " the *Pascal*, or rather the *Anti-Pascal*, of a man who is superior to *Pascal*." Does this greater man than *Pascal* publish, for it was the fashion, some *éloges*?—" I was asked the other day," writes Voltaire, " what I thought of the *Eloges* of M. de Condorcet. I replied by writing on the title-page, ' Justice, accuracy, learning, clearness, precision, taste, elegance, and nobleness.' " Has he occasion to speak of *Marmontel*?—" Our age must have lain sweltering in the mud, had not the fifteenth chapter of *Belisarius* been written." Has he to speak of *La Harpe*, on the announcement of a new piece from his pen?—" Europe is waiting for *Melanie*," says he. In his correspondence with *D'Alembert*, we find perpetually, " *My dear great man—my dear universal genius—adieu, thou man who art above thine age and country—adieu, great man—adieu, eagle,*" and the like ;‡ the whole, to give

\* *Grande femme* means tall woman.—*Trans.*

† October 1749.

‡ Which did not prevent him from laughing on some occasions at *D'Alembert*, as he laughed at everybody. In 1771, after calling him in an epistle

" Mind deep and just, my perfect friend, true sage,"



higher relief to these magnificent expressions, amid familiarities and obscenities of all sorts. D'Alembert is more reserved. He says no more ordinarily than "*My dear master,*" and this, no doubt, is the title to which Voltaire had the best claim; but one is amused to find Voltaire himself sometimes take a fancy for calling himself the disciple of one or other of those who never had any other master than himself. To that same Diderot, to whom, in 1760, we have seen him write that he looked on him "as a man whom the world could not be without," see what he further writes in 1773: "I have been very agreeably surprised by receiving your letter, signed Diderot. Figure to yourself what would have been the joy of an old soldier, covered with wounds, had he had a letter from M. Turenne!" Here we have the patriarch making himself a scholar; the generalissimo descending to the rank of a simple soldier. He well knew that the best way to command was to seem to obey.

But it is chiefly with the great and the wealthy that we find him most at his ease in his eulogies, and professing serious surprise if charged with exaggeration. He sneers at Corneille for dedicating his *Cinna* to M. de Montauron, the financier, and for calling him another Augustus; but if we never find himself on his knees before mere riches, all that is required to deify them, in his eyes, is their being placed at the service of the doctrines of the day. Do but that, and

he sends to the Marquis de Ximenes, asking him to guess out the author, verses which the Marquis does not hesitate to attribute to him, and that without his defending himself from the charge:

"Th' *Encyclopédie* alliance  
Proud of their chief see strut,  
Of universal science  
A treasure never shut.  
This praise that personage  
Suits well, for D'Alembert  
I own an ape beyond compare  
Of *savant*, wit, and sage."

you are the man for him ; be a millionaire, and you shall have talents ; ay, genius even will be yours. One might make a volume of his compliments to Helvetius. Nor let it be thought that he had waited, at least, for the publication of that great book of his, which was to make so much noise, before he proclaimed its author a great man. Helvetius, although this is not generally known, began his career as a writer of verses. It was those verses that Voltaire professed to admire, and to admire, too, as he admired those of nobody else, except perhaps Racine's, and even that not always :—

“ Shall I not see the verse you make,  
 Thou charming friend and wit sublime ?  
 Heav'n bids you of that fire partake  
 To which Boileau could never climb :  
 Mere imitation marks his rhyme ;  
 Creative genius once might be  
 My gift, but now it rests with thee.”

A year passes,\* and still we find him addressing him as “ my dear rival, my poet, my *philosopher*,” for this last expression was beginning to include all that could be said in praise of a man's talents and virtues. He seems to dread lest “ this new Apollo,” who was in fact sufficiently modest, should not admire himself enough. “ You know not,” he writes to him, “ what beauties that epistle will have ; and I tell you that the finest of Boileau's will be inferior to it.”

III.—But let a regal crown at last overpower his vision, or, at least, authorize his acting like a man whose sight is overpowered, we then find him out-Heroding Herod in the fulsomeness of his eulogies. It will be evident that we speak of his flatteries to the King of Prussia.

We would remark, nevertheless, that people have, perhaps, gone a little too far in their raillery at the literary pretensions

\* 1741.

of that prince. First of all, be it observed, these pretensions were not really what they are understood to have been. The king's main object in writing was amusement; he was nowise vain of his productions, as may at once be inferred from his never being afraid to have them corrected and polished. "As long as the sun shall shine upon the world," he writes to Voltaire, in 1770, "your works will last; as for mine, it will be said: It is much to say that this king was not quite a blockhead. This and this is tolerable; had he been born in private life, he might have made a living as a corrector of the press."

We think, in fact, that one can hardly refuse him a place among second-rate authors. He has written, setting aside objections on the score of his bad doctrines, pages that are not wanting in eloquence; he has composed—and here we speak of that only which was really his—verses which are not those of a bad poet. Besides, we must distinguish betwixt his first rude attempts and what he wrote afterwards. In his correspondence with Voltaire, the progress he makes is very marked, and continues to the last; indeed, towards the close, you will find here and there a letter which would not have been unworthy of Voltaire himself.

But Voltaire had not waited for these improvements when he expressed an unreserved admiration, constantly divided—these are his words—between the great writer and the great king. His innumerable letters to that prince form a sort of complete course of the art of praising. There you have incense of all sorts, from the coarsest to the most refined, and meet with the same things re-occurring under twenty, thirty, forty different forms, ever new and ever striking. It presents a sad *chef-d'œuvre*, but certainly it is one.

Let us say nothing of mere words, for of these there is an infinite variety. *Great man* rarely occurs; it had become

hackneyed. *Hero*, too, was rather too common a term ; but, as Frederick seemed not to disdain it, it is occasionally applied to him. *Genius* was very well in its way ; but some such epithet as *universal* or *unique* is always studiously added. We shall not find the prince called a *great soul*, for that sounds rather classical, and then, too, he did not believe in the soul ; but it must be *thirty souls in one body*, and that satisfied both. *Your Majesty* being too much of an old-world expression, it is made *Your Immensity*. Frederick is the *Solomon of the North*, and the eighteenth century is *the age of Frederick*.

" Behold this *savant* circled round with glory,  
A chief in battles, ruling with high hand  
Even Bellona—he whose ample soul  
Runs its immortal course through all the arts ;  
Who all things knows, all does, and who with ease  
Springs from Parnassian to Olympian heights,  
And now at whist and now at battles plays."\*

" You, and you only, worthily can sing  
Your matchless virtues ; you whose royal hand  
I've seen the lyre and lance alternate bear :  
You who, in style as rapid as in deeds,  
Write prose—write poetry—with all the ease  
With which you take from enemies a town."†

" O king-philosopher, how bright my course !  
By flow'ry paths I shall Sans-Souci leave  
For fields Elysian, converse there to hold  
With Mark-Aurelius on his greatest heir  
In kingly arts and high philosophy ;  
There read thy history to Sallust, struck  
With envy at its charms beyond his own.‡  
Lycurgus of your laws shall hear ; your verse  
To Maro I'll repeat ; the mighty dead  
Shall listen, with incredulous amaze,  
To tales of talents so diverse that none,  
Not e'en the greatest, e'er possess'd them all."

And all this, during those years, intermingled with remarks on the monarch's bad rhymes, heavy Teutonisms, on *opinion*

\* 1741.

† 1744.

‡ *History of the House of Brandenburg*, by the King of Prussia.

spelt by the king *opignon*, on *science*, which he made a dissyllable, and a thousand faults of detail which Voltaire notes that he might the better dispense with seeing great ones, but not without begging a thousand pardons for calling the attention of so great a genius to such trifles. "With the aid of a small twopenny file, how perfectly might all this be elaborated!" And yet he knew better than any one that the prince's verses were not elaborated at all. To Voltaire they were sent just as jotted down—that Voltaire whom he calls his Aristarchus, and ends with calling him his foul-linen washer. In 1737, when Frederick first began to tease him to death by sending him every scrap he indited, "I am with you," writes Voltaire to him, "as a circle infinitely small concentric with another circle infinitely great. All the radii of the infinitely great circle run into the centre of the infinitely small one, but what a difference between their circumferences!" A year after this, he writes: "I send you some of my verses, and you honour me with some of yours. This reminds me of the perpetual intercourse which, Hesiod says, the earth holds with heaven. The earth sends up vapours, the gods return the favour in dew." Note that what Voltaire had sent on this occasion was his *Mérope*, and that the return on Frederick's part had been a miserable ode on Patience, addressed to his friend Kaiserling on his having the gout.

IV.—All these praises, it is true, the king repaid with usury.

Racine went very far, even for that period, when he maintained, that what most of all should encourage the Academy in its labours on the French language, was the thought of its serving, and being likely ever better and better to serve, for the celebration of the renown of Louis XIV.

What in that poet's mouth had been a mere hyperbole for

an occasion, Frederick made, in some sort, a reality in his relations with Voltaire. He seemed to study French only to enable him to praise Voltaire in his own tongue; and all those niceties of expression which he succeeded in reaching, well or ill, with his somewhat heavy pen, he was proud to offer, as a bouquet of French flowers raised in Germany, to the man to whose pages he had owed so much.

This bouquet had at times so strong a perfume, that Voltaire himself, much used as he was to the smell of incense, found it rather too much. In 1740, he beseeches the king to abate somewhat the tone of a preface which that prince had written for the *Henriade*, and which he had sent to Voltaire for correction. "I have to beg the favour," he writes, "of being allowed to retrench some things which I am very sensible I do not quite deserve. I am like some courtier of sober views, if you ever meet with such, who would say to you: 'A little greatness, if you please; but not too much, for that may turn my head.'" Not that he really feared his head might be turned; but, with the habitual tact that saw at a glance what should be said, and what left unsaid, in order to his being the man of the day, he would have dreaded getting more praise than the public might have instantly ratified.

We do not see, accordingly, that the flattery of his royal disciple was always as agreeable to him as one might suppose. Whatever, for example, might have been his pretensions to reign supreme in his own field, he could not have liked to hear such gross adulation as that addressed to him by the king in 1736: "You, before whom the Corneilles and Racines must hide their diminished heads." No doubt, he felt highly flattered at the prince expressing a desire to behold in his person "the highest perfection that that age and France had produced;" but he was evidently a little embarrassed with

phrases such as these: "Your works would be enough to immortalize twenty great men."\* "None but a god could comprise in one person all the perfections you possess."† "Fable tells us of a giant who had a hundred arms. You have a hundred geniuses; you embrace the whole universe, as Atlas bore it on his shoulders."‡ "You are the first-born of thinking beings."§ "You are the hero of reason, the Prometheus of our days, who brought celestial light for the illumination of the blind."|| "Although I have come into the world too soon to be present at the triumph of philosophy, I do not regret it; I have seen Voltaire."¶ "I will end my letter as Louis XIV. did his epistle to Boileau: '*I admire and am dumb.*'"\*\*\*

V.—Why have we pressed these details? Not, certainly, for the pleasure to be found in retouching a picture, curiously interesting, but very well known, and useless enough in itself.

The minutest details become valuable when they are linked with the tendencies of an age. Then they often say more than the greatest facts.

In Voltaire and Frederick we see the eighteenth century in one of its main features; equality establishing itself between the kingship of thrones and the kingship of books.

It did not establish itself everywhere in the same manner. Frederick seemed to feel happy in being the first to make it a palpable fact; Louis XV. only submitted to it, but he submitted all the better in that he perceived it less or repelled it more. The King of Prussia, in fact, with all his eagerness to yield, in so far as words go, to the ideas of which Voltaire was the representative, continued to act not the less as a king, and as an absolute king; the King of France caused every page that seemed to reflect upon the ancient rights of his

\* 1737. † 1738. ‡ 1739. § 1740. || 1769. ¶ 1773. \*\*\* 1776.

crown to be burned, and the new ideas occupy, in spite of him, a large place even in his edicts.

From this incoherent fusion of the old and the new, between things established and ideas in course of being established, there arose inconsistencies without end. Kings, nations, great and small, all fell into them. Subjects—these called themselves *citizens* ;\* absolute kings—these fancied themselves the friends of liberty.

In 1773, a posthumous work of Helvetius,† replete with declamations against despotism, was dedicated to the most absolute sovereign in Europe, and perhaps in the world, the Empress of Russia. She accepted the homage thus paid to her, and sincerely, too. She believed herself to be liberal, because she was an unbeliever, and gave a pension to D'Alembert. "What say you of the revolution in Sweden?" she wrote, a year before, to Voltaire. "There we see a nation lose, in less than a quarter of an hour, its form of government and its liberty. We see the King of Sweden *as despotic as the King of France*." A curious lesson this ; still more curious the person who gives it.

Louis XV. did not give lessons in these matters ; he contented himself, we have said, with receiving them.

In 1749, Crebillon presented his *Xerxes* to him. The king opened it at random, when his eye at once fell on the following line :—

"Fear made the gods ; audacity made kings."

Far from being angry, he admired it ; even then, he would not have dared to entertain any other sentiment.

In 1763, the same thing happened with respect to Leblanc's *Manco-Capac*. This *Manco-Capac* was a poor enough piece,

\* When the municipality of Calais decreed that Dubelloy should, on account of his tragedy, have the title of citizen of that town, some wit remarked that Dubelloy was about to be the only citizen in France.

† *De l'Homme et de ses Facultés* (Of Man and his Faculties).



a sort of *contrat social* expressed in lachrymose theatricals. The principal character is a savage; and, thus far, nothing could be better. But all he says is taken from Rousseau; all that he does, he himself arranges in arguments after the manner of Rousseau. Towards the close, for example, as the high-priest is preparing to assassinate the son of the king, it is this incomparable savage who is made to snatch the dagger from his hand, exclaiming—

“See there the civilized—see, too, the savage man.”

On which the public made the theatre shake with its plaudits; and the Court, too, applauded, for the piece was played two days afterwards at the Court theatre; and none expressed more admiration than the king, albeit it was filled, says Bachaumont, “with things strongly reflecting on royalty.—But,” he adds, “all this the author softened down, by adding the following four verses, addressed to the king:—

“ ‘I’ve drawn a king both just and merciful,  
Of virtues meriting immortal glory.  
Ah! how aught else could I have ever done?  
My master was the model for my muse.’ ”

The *master* fancied himself praised; he durst not perceive that it was at the expense of the throne—nay, at the expense of society itself. In what quarter, at this epoch, do we not find proofs of the same infatuation?

When the printing of the *Encyclopédie* was interdicted for the second time, Malesherbes, the director of the book trade, ordered Diderot’s papers to be carried off; but he sent notice to Diderot the day before. Great was the author’s gratitude, but great, also, his embarrassment. For where was he to conceal those papers? Who would be willing to take charge of them? “Send them to me,” said Malesherbes; “nobody will think of looking for them there;” and his conscience is

at rest ; he has no perception of his having betrayed his duty. He was free to love Diderot, but that a man of honour—and such he was—should have imagined such a farce, indicated a deplorable relaxation in public morality. Moreover, the secret friends of the philosophers were not singular in so contriving matters as to remain on good terms with them. Few believers know how to hit on a middle course between fanatical hate and craven obsequiousness. We ought not to curse the infidel ; no more ought we to behave as if we saw nothing between him and ourselves but a mere difference in our opinions.

“I never shall forget that one evening, at supper, in the house of a young nobleman, a little abbé, dressed out like a doll, had set himself to divert the company at the expense of the old faith. When he came to speak of hell, which he called his *feu de joie*, an old army officer, the only one of the party that did not laugh, said to him : ‘Sir, looking at your uniform, I can plainly see what regiment you belong to ; but it appears to me that you are a deserter.’ ‘Sir,’ he replied, continuing to smile, ‘there may be some truth in what you say ; but I am not in my corps what you are in yours, a field officer.’ ‘Good !’ replied the officer ; ‘that you never should be, for, judging by your conduct, you ought to have been hanged long ago.’”\* But few were like this field-officer.

In 1766, among the charges brought against the Chevalier de la Barre, who was condemned to a horrible punishment, there was that of having recited a certain infamous ode ; yet Piron, the author of that very ode, had long enjoyed a pension from the royal privy purse. It was Montesquieu who had got him this pension, to console him for having been unable, on account of that same ode, to get admission into the Academy. Nor would Montesquieu himself have found admission there,

\* Montell, *Les Français des divers états*.

but for the weakness with which people allowed themselves to be overborne by the novel ideas and the hardihood of the day. It was to his *Persian Letters*, the only work he had published at the time, that he had owed his election; and that book was fitted to shock all that the Academy was specially bound to see respected—religion, the memory of Louis XIV., and the honour of the Academy itself.

As for religion, Montesquieu had done more harm to it by his sarcastic levity than others, afterwards, by writing large books. This, let us not forget, was prior to the raillery of Voltaire. Montesquieu's pleasantries, though less indecent and less fierce, were, for the time, not less scandalously audacious.

Then, as for Louis XIV., he had accused him of despotism, pride, prodigality, and feebleness;\* he had been the first to say in a book what had, till then, been said only in pamphlets and in songs.

What, besides, had he not said of the Academy? "I have heard people talk of a kind of tribunal called the French Academy. Not another court in the whole world commands less respect; for it is said, that no sooner has it pronounced its verdicts than the people annuls them.

"Those who compose this court have nothing to do but to talk. Eulogy takes its seat, as of its own accord, in the midst of this unceasing babble.

"This body has forty heads, all of them filled with figures, metaphors, and antitheses. So many mouths hardly speak except in the way of exclamation. Its ears are ever itching for well-balanced and harmonious sentences. As for eyes, no attention is paid to them; it seems as if made only for speaking, but not for seeing. It was once said that it had greedy hands, but I leave that to be decided by those who know more of the matter than I.

\* Letters xxviii. and cvii.

"Here are oddities such as are not to be seen in our Persia. We have no turn for such singular and oddly-fashioned establishments."\*

It was with these passages in his hand, that Montesquieu proceeded to knock at the door of the Academy, and the Academy hastened to let him in. Like the wife of Sganarelle, it liked to be beaten. Montesquieu had boldly assaulted the ancient order of things, and this was enough for the very defenders of monarchical and literary tradition to think themselves bound to recompense him. Hardly had he been admitted a member when he set out on a tour through Europe, and nowhere did this man, who had buffeted the Popes,† meet with a warmer reception than in the city of the Popes, and from a Pope—from Benedict XIII., who, however, was not Benedict XIV., the future *friend* of Voltaire. Then, when admitted to an audience, on taking leave, he had bestowed on him one of those old pontifical favours which had, even at that time, become ridiculous—that of being allowed to eat flesh on Fridays. The story goes, that when payment for the diploma to that effect came to be asked for, the Pope having said nothing about its being given gratis, Montesquieu said, that the Pope being an honest fellow, he would trust to his word. This was another stroke added to the *Persian Letters*. Whose fault was it?

Voltaire himself did not disdain, in case of need, these stale favours. In 1770, having had an opportunity of doing some services to the Capuchin monks of Gex, he got from Father Alamballa, the general of that order, the patent of *temporal father* of that monastery, and for this he thanked him without laughing, and with the heartiest feeling. But did he not, in

\* Letter lxxiii.

† Letters xxiv. and xxix. "The Pope is the chief of the Christians. He is an old idol, to whom people present incense from custom," &c.

1761, go so far as to ask for relics? "It is my destiny," said he, "to buffet Rome, and to make her subservient to my small desires. The experiment of *Mahomet* encourages me. I am making, accordingly, a pretty demand on the holy Father—no less than that of a gift of relics for my church, an indulgence *in articulo mortis*, and, during my lifetime, a capital bull for myself alone, granting me permission to cultivate the earth on holidays without being damned."\* In point of fact, a few months after, he writes: "I have received, on one and the same day, relics from the Pope and Madame de Pompadour's portrait. The relics consist of the hair shirt of St. Francis." In 1745, at the time of that famous experiment of *Mahomet*, what a stir there was about getting a letter from the Pope, and, when the letter came, what transports of joy followed! "Truly, the celestial favours cannot be too widely diffused, and the holy Father's letter is made for publicity. It is well that the persecutors of good people should know that I am screened from their attacks by the robe of the vicar of God."† And all that he said on that occasion with a sarcastic grin, he would say upon other occasions with the utmost seriousness; for it was not only to divert himself that he assumed the air of being on good terms with the Court of Rome. It furnished one, among other means, of replying to his enemies. He well knew that people would not believe him; for, in reality, he would have been very angry had they done so. "As for you," he wrote to Frederick in 1759, "you would still caress the wretch (*l'infame*) with one hand, while you would wound her with another; you would treat her as you usually do me and everybody."

But how could *the wretch* submit to such caresses? In 1745, we might still let matters pass. The question was only about accepting the dedication of a piece, the author of which

\* Letter to D'Argental.

† Ibid.

had said: "To whom could I more fitly address a satire on the cruelties and the errors of a false prophet, than to the vicar and the imitator of a God of peace and of truth?" But in 1761, to him who could affirm, "I am tired of hearing them say that but twelve men were required to found their religion; I will clearly show them that no more than one is required for its destruction:" but to Voltaire, in fine—for that name alone implied everything—relics were sent! Thunders of the Vatican, where were ye then?

They were asleep; they durst no longer not sleep. Ecclesiastical and governmental toleration sometimes showed itself in singular details. Duclos, in 1766, took a journey to Rome; and the first kind action offered to him by a cardinal, was to apply to the Pope in his favour for permission to have in his possession and to read the forbidden books. It was feared that his being deprived of them might too sensibly affect him; and it was reckoned among the duties imposed by hospitality to lose no time in supplying him with such food for his soul, just as one would like to procure for his guest some favourite dish of the nation he comes from. When Marmontel, in 1760, was committed to the Bastille, it happened to be Friday. An excellent fast-day dinner was brought to him, which he fell to without dreaming of anything better. But just as his servant, whom he had been allowed to retain, began to make his dinner of what was left, there was brought in a meat dinner. The first had been intended for the servant. The court could venture to imprison a philosopher, but durst not compel him to eat a fast-day dinner.

## CHAPTER III

- I.—The general tide of ideas—No more political and social faith—Inequality under Louis XIV.—Equality recollected, but not reclaimed—Low birth caused neither shame nor uneasiness—Inequality under Louis XV.—Shaken in its foundations, it became more severe in its forms—A coachman in 1780.
- II.—Facts and ideas change their meaning with the times—The mysteries of the Middle Ages would have been impieties in the seventeenth century<sup>2</sup>—The *Lutrin* would have been so at this day—In the eighteenth century all unsettlement was serious—Importance of details apparently futile—How it is that the *Encyclopédie* would have been harmless at the present day—One good that has arisen from the reading of bad books.
- III.—Cause of their influence at that time—The novelty of ideas—That of liberty—The reader always went beyond what the author had written—The Abbé Girard and his examples—A word becomes heretical by contact.
- IV.—The theatre and the throne—Henry IV.'s hunting-party—*Éricie* or the *Vestal*—The censorship at the archi-episcopal palace—*The Reapers*—An approbation that cost him dear that gave it.
- V.—The pettiest authors become men of consequence—How people mutually made themselves such—Some specimens of eulogiums—Marmontel at Bordeaux—His *Belisarius* in Russia—Abundance of good-for-nothing books—Pitchers, steeple-bells, and men—After the first rank there was nothing—Our age is better parcelled out in this respect—It was too easy to get one's-self spoken of—Some farther examples—*Pompignan*—*The Interpretation of nature*—Grimm—Tissot.
- VI.—Quarrels among authors—Hume and Rousseau—Immense noise made about it—A little story told two hundred and twenty-five times—Italian and French music—Rousseau—*Panem et circenses*.

It was not, perhaps, so much from fear as from the general tide of ideas that positions, which might still have been capable of defence, were abandoned without a struggle. It was not courage that was wanting; it was faith; I mean political and social faith, for we shall have to speak of the other elsewhere. With a king who durst not have faith in the royal authority, and an aristocracy who thought it fashionable no

longer to have faith in nobility, the levellers necessarily had all their own way.

In the time of Louis XIV., on the contrary, the idea of inequality appears to us to have been deeply engraven on the minds of the little no less than of the great. No doubt you would hear it said in the pulpit, that men are equal; you would see both Court and city applaud Boileau's outbreaks against noblemen without virtue; but from this to practical consequences, the distance still was such that no one dreamt of overleaping it. Of a host of men of letters, none—and Boileau no more than any other—would take offence at being kept at a distance by those great folks, “baked,” he would say, “of the same clay with himself;” and if those great ones ever deigned to become accessible, this would make those who were thus permitted to approach them, grateful, but not the bolder on that account. Then, again, what gratitude, what effusion of feeling, what transports, when they condescended to bestow any striking mark of interest on men of letters, or on literature! Nor was it only towards Richelieu, or towards Louis XIV., that the whole literary world of France, with the academies at its head, was lost in everlasting acknowledgments. There was not a nobleman who could not be a Richelieu, a Louis XIV., an Augustus. The Duke de la Force had founded the academy of Bordeaux, and this was enough to lead to his hearing himself, at a solemn meeting, called “That protector, whose mighty genius watches over us. We have seen him,” the speaker goes on to say, “quit the charms of the Court and make us sensible of his presence even in the depth of our provinces. It is thus that ancient fable represents to us those beneficent deities, who, from their dwelling-places in the heavens, came down to the earth, for the civilization of savage tribes.” And the author of this fine compliment to the Bordolese was no starving poet—it



was Montesquieu, and in 1716. Even in our days it is worth while to attend to what could be written by an author who piqued herself, it is true, on her great fidelity to the ideas of the good old times. "Our kings have ever loved literature," says Madame de Genlis.\* "In the period of the very first race, Chilperic wanted to perfect French orthography, and to add Greek letters to the alphabet. There were two learned men who preferred having their ears cut off to accepting the innovation." Here, truly, we have a well-chosen example, and a protector, in fact, whom we should be ungrateful to forget.

But, to return to the times of Louis XIV., people, generally speaking, were no more shocked at seeing a man above themselves in the social hierarchy, than to see one endowed with a stronger constitution, or of a better size, or more agreeable features; one might regret having had an inferior share of the goods of fortune, as the dwarf might regret his not being a few inches higher; but the inequality of ranks had become as natural, in some sort, as that of the proportions of the body in different persons. Besides this, no shame attached to living in dependence on the great. Since the latter were proud to discharge servile offices to the king,† who would have thought himself degraded by doing the same thing to them? Pensions, and even money given in hand, were thought honourable; something analogous, in short, to the ribbons and crosses of the present day. Crown pieces coming from a Louis XIV., from a prince of Condé, from a simple duke, or from a finance minister of high reputation, were like medals conferring glory on him that received them.

Under Louis XV., most of these peculiarities seemed still to hold their ground; and yet they covered quite a different

\* *Dictionnaire des Etiquettes.*

† "It is I who have the honour to take the dressing-gown of the King of Spain when he goes to bed, and to give it to him, along with his slippers, when he rises."—Letter of the Princess des Ursins to Madame de Maintenon.

state of things; they sometimes even acquired strength in proportion as the foundation beneath became more seriously affected. Towards the close of that reign, while equality was proclaimed on the housetops, access to the higher ranks of the army was closed against the commonalty (*roturiers*) by a more formal *ordonnance* than any that had yet appeared. And even in the ranks of the commonalty, distinctions became more marked than ever. Never had precedence among trades and employments been more strictly observed than after people began to talk of abolishing the corporations—those old aristocracies of the wareroom and the workshop. A lady of high rank wanted a coachman; she found one who seemed likely to suit her. "But," said he, "before engaging myself, I should like my lady to say to whom my lady gives precedence in the streets." "To everybody," she replied. "If others give it me, I take it; if not, I wait my turn." "In that case," the man rejoined, "I cannot close with Madame. I never give place to any but princes of the blood." Mark that this great lord in livery, whose name was Girard, ended with being a red-hot democrat. In 1793, being appointed public accuser, he sent to the scaffold those very aristocrats who were not aristocratical enough, in his opinion, in 1780.

II.—Seldom does it happen, generally speaking, that the same fact and the same idea preserve, at the distance of a century, the same meaning and the same importance.

Thus, for example, according as religion shall be more or less rooted in a people's mind and heart, one and the same fact may or may not be an assault upon it.

Are we indignant at the buffooneries with which sacred history was seasoned four or five centuries ago, in what were called *Mysteries*? Sad to think, no doubt, that Christianity should have sunk so low; but those farces, owing precisely to

that circumstance, were not in the least the offspring of infidelity. It was immediately after attending mass that people went to hear Jesus Christ jesting with His disciples, and the mass of the following day was not the less respected. See, at a later period, the jests of Rabelais, Machiavel, Aretin, of an Archbishop La Casa, of a Cardinal Bembo, and of many others. Were they charged with impiety? And Ariosto? Why, Leo X. attended the representation of his far from orthodox comedies. Leo X. was no great believer; but he was the Pope, and a Pope would not have sanctioned by his presence what would have been regarded as derogatory to the faith. But let us suppose these same comedies written in the seventeenth century, at the time of *Esther* and *Athalie*, and even then they could have had none but avowed *libertines* for either authors or spectators.

More than this: what was still harmless at this latter period—could we suppose it written a hundred years later—must be appreciated very differently. Think you that the *Lutrin* could, in the eighteenth century, have been the work of a good believer like Boileau? Those same pleasantries, with which the Lamoignons, the Montausiers, and even Bourdaloue were so delighted, would only have seemed echoes of Voltaire. Even at the present day, although antichristian pleasantry be less in fashion, and though there be less risk of the *Lutrin* assuming an irreligious signification, no believer would write it.\*

Accordingly, there was little enough sincerity in the bold spirits of the eighteenth century, when they sought to shelter themselves behind those old exhibitions of boldness. They merely repeated, if we are to believe them, what had been said with impunity during those epochs when thought was

\* The same fact might be noted in another question which we shall afterwards touch upon. Who is it that would repeat, at the present day, unless in avowing himself a communist, the strong things said by Pascal and Boileau against property?

less free, and power more absolute. Was Louis XV., then, more sensitive than Louis XIV., and his clergy more severe than Bossuet? This was mere sophistry. The times had changed. Every shake was serious, however gentle the impulse of the hand that gave it. Dangerous ideas are like those diseases which, according to the season and the state of the atmosphere, turn out of little consequence, or become mortal.

Without observing this, we should be unable to comprehend the effect which might be produced at such or such an epoch, by such or such an attack, which may appear to us to be mild indeed ; by such or such a writing, as, at the present day, we should consider neither very mischievous nor very violent. Who has not witnessed the profound astonishment, into which the *Encyclopédie*, for example, sometimes throws readers little versed in the history of those times ? "What !" they exclaim, "is this what preachers tell us shook the altar and the throne ? Is this the article on the *soul*, which, from the publication of the first volume, excited so many apprehensions and so much wrath ? But we have read matter ten times worse in books which are found everywhere, and even in newspapers which do not pass for being the worst."

All this is true. We have done like Mithridates : we have habituated ourselves to poisons.

This sad habit has nevertheless its good side. Bad books, at the present day, generally do less mischief than one would at first sight imagine, on looking at the monstrous ideas that are accumulated in them ; the most incendiary newspapers, excepting in certain moments of crisis, end with being read as one would read it matters not what. At what point shall we stop ? Are our children to become habituated to something still worse ? A hundred years ago, atheism was thought the extreme ; and not even then was it seen in all its nakedness. Well, then, what La Mettrie and Diderot could not

have thought possible, there are people who overleap. Not content with denying the existence of God, and that in the face of the sun, they have written that the very idea of a God is the source of miseries and of crimes. "The first duty of intelligent and free man," according to them, "is strenuously to banish the idea of God from his mind and his conscience. For God, if He exist, is essentially hostile to our nature, and we are nowise amenable to His authority. We make our way to science in spite of Him, to outward comfort in spite of Him, to society in spite of Him; every step in our progress is a victory, in which we crush the Divinity."\* When blasphemy runs into such raving madness as this, the remedy is not far from the disease.

III.—Two causes, then—to return to the other century—gave notoriety and importance to all that did not fall within the old circle of ideas.

First, it was novelty. There was the novelty of the ideas themselves, and there was also—and this, in reality, had most attractions—the novelty of the very freedom with which people ventured to announce them; for the press, in fact, was free. Sometimes openly, and with licenses filched from the censors; sometimes clandestinely, or beyond the French frontier—everything was printed. There were just enough of obstacles to give a daily fresh zest to the pleasure of vanquishing them; just enough of severities exercised to give everything new the attractiveness of forbidden fruit. Cloyed with everything else, that generation could not fail to find a relish in the only food they were not sated with. Montesquieu, Voltaire himself, on their arrival in England, found the fruits of English liberty almost too much for their taste. Every morning, on reading the opposition newspapers, they seemed to think that

\* *Système des Contradictions économiques*, ch. viii.

not only the ministry, but the monarchy itself, would be shivered to atoms within four-and-twenty hours.\* Who, then, could wonder at the effect produced in France by the first echoes, feeble as they were, of that confounding din which had frightened Voltaire on his setting foot on a free soil?

Moreover—and this is the second cause—as authors let it be seen that they durst not speak out all they had to say, their readers outran their words; and it was only after doubling their force, that their full meaning was supposed to be got at.

The contrary takes place at the present day. We have seen so much exaggeration both of words and of ideas, that we hold ourselves, so to speak, on the hither side of what we read; and the wisest authors are led to exaggerate, if they would obtain a little belief.

At that period, accordingly, the reader never failed to amplify, to comment, and to complete. The most innocent phrase in appearance, perhaps even in reality, was supposed to involve some enormity of freethinking. Next, the attacks were concealed, and discovered themselves in quarters where they would least have been looked for in other times. Thus, in the *Encyclopédie*, the shortest articles in physics, chemistry, and even algebra, entered deeply at times into philosophy, religion, and politics. That Bible of modern times had, as has sometimes been believed of the old, two meanings—one for the vulgar, the other for adepts. But in the eighteenth century all were adepts. Everybody looked for the hidden meaning; every one discovered more or less of it.

The Abbé Girard, author of *French Synonyms*, published his grammar in 1747. At first, it was read as a grammar; then, of a sudden, it was remarked by somebody, that the

\* "As the devil is seen in the periodical papers, it is thought that the people are about to revolt immediately."—Montesquieu, *Pensées sur l'Angleterre*.

phrases quoted as examples are almost all borrowed from the philosophical language of the day. Was this somebody a friend or an enemy? Had the author had the intention that was imputed to him, or had he been only the involuntary echo of the phraseology of the moment? We cannot say; but from that time forward, there was nobody in France that did not set himself to search in his work for something very different from grammatical disquisitions.

In the *Encyclopédie*, not far from the famous article *Ame* (the Soul), an insignificant phrase had likewise been made all of a sudden to assume an immense importance. It runs thus: "Most men honour letters as they honour religion and virtue—that is to say, as something they cannot understand, or love, or practise."\* *Cannot!* Here was a phrase which was to be attacked as fatalist, impious, or, worse still, Jansenist.† It is certain that this word, when rigorously applied to the knowledge and the practice of religion, touched on the deepest questions—on predestination, grace, free-will. It was replied that the author, in this passage, had evidently never dreamt of so applying it; that the phrase, besides, was taken from Vauvenargues,‡ in whose works divines had never condemned or remarked it. But it could be rejoined, not without reason, that the surrounding matter gave it, in the *Encyclopédie*, a seriousness which did not belong to it elsewhere.

Many other pieces were in the same case. However innocent in the authors from whom they were taken, they assumed, in their new position, a hostile and formidable

\* Article, *Amour des Sciences et des Arts*—(Love of the Sciences and Arts).

† Racine is known to have had much annoyance on account of the two lines in his *Phèdre*:—

" You love; his destiny man cannot alter,  
A fatal charm bore you perforce along."

‡ *Introduction à la Connaissance de l'esprit Humain.*

attitude. Nothing more inoffensive than street pavement, yet it is with pavement stones that barricades are made.

IV.—The resistance offered by the Government was not therefore always so puerile as one may be tempted to believe, when he looks at the apparent slightness of the motives to it. Many things seem to us now to have been contemptible affairs, which nowise were so then. Louis XIV. might have tolerated attacks made on whatever was not himself: he had laughed at the cries of the victims of Boileau, Molière, and La Bruyère; he had been the first to hold Cotin ridiculous, when the poor abbé wished to point to the enemies of the throne in his own personal enemies. But as for the enemies of the Cotins, under Louis XV., it was impossible any longer to be blind to the fact, that their shafts took a much higher flight, and one needed to take care to be well out of their reach.

The drama, in particular, filled a large space among the great affairs of state. The question whether a piece was to be allowed to appear, or to be prohibited, was one before which all the interests of the day would quail for a whole month. That same monarch, who was known to be a stranger to all that was doing in his kingdom, was seen, sceptre in hand, to weigh the destiny of a comedy or of a couplet. The very administration of the theatres, down to the pettiest details, emanated from him. It was *in the king's name* that the prices of the places were posted up; and while these words, *au nom du roi*, when put at the head of great edicts, were looked upon as a mere form, it was known that here they really meant *in the king's name*, and that he had really interested himself in the business. Even in the provinces, although the central authority intervened less then than now in the details of the administration, all theatrical affairs emanated from the minister of the royal household. Indeed



there were occasionally, as at Marseilles in 1753, rather serious conflicts on that subject between the municipalities and the crown.

In 1766, people wished to know if the *Partie de la Chasse d'Henri IV.* (Henry IV.'s Hunting Party), by Collé, was to be allowed to appear. The predicament was sufficiently serious. Could the King of France allow his ancestor to appear on the stage, even in a character that did him honour? This question, by order of Louis XV., was remitted to the council of state, and opinions there were found to be divided. The king would try the affair himself. It was examined by the ministers in council, and the play was not authorized. But while interdicted at Paris, it was allowed to be produced at the provincial theatres.

In 1768, it was *Ericie* or *the Vestal*, by a now forgotten author, Fontenelle, that was to receive its sentence. Approved by the players, it was rejected by the censorship, in consequence of its being, in what it says of vestals, full of allusions to conventual cunning. But reclamations and agitation following, it was sent by the lieutenant of police—to whom does the reader think?—to the archbishop, with a request for his opinion. The archbishop, great in excommunicating comedians, was doubtless prepared to reply that he could not, in any case, approve of a play. Not at all. He appointed a commission, composed of parish priests and doctors. Upon their advice, after a long examination, the piece was anew forbidden. The printing of it was also prohibited. It needs not be said that forthwith it was printed—that the prohibition promoted the sale, and even enhanced its reputation.

On another occasion, it was the *Reapers* of Favart that was under sentence. The royal censor, M. Marin, thought the piece so good, so harmless, that instead of a mere approbatory formula, he wrote at the end of it quite a eulogium. "If,"

said he, "none but pieces such as this, had ever been represented in our theatres, there never would have been a question raised about the danger of plays, and the severest moralists would have been as zealous in recommending them, as they have been in the warmth of those declamations by which they have endeavoured to keep the public from attending them." And this magnificent passport was printed at the beginning of the play. But no sooner was this done, than those great enemies of the theatre, the Jansenists, exclaimed that it was scandalous. How had the censor exceeded his bounds! All well to approve of theatrical pieces, for that is his trade; but let him not approve of the theatre. The comptroller-general, M. de l'Averdy, was applied to, and he was a man that did not understand raillery in such matters. He was remonstrated with on the enormity of the case, and the poor censor lost a pension of two thousand livres.

But we shall return again to the subject of the official censorship. Its history is a highly interesting one, at an epoch when its worn-out arms had to make head against so many fresh-whetted blades.

V.—From the importance of writings, even the harmless and the feeble, there naturally followed the importance of authors, even second, third, and fourth-rate.

To this result, it is true, they did their best to contribute by the importance they mutually attributed to each other. Not that they did not well know how, in case of their quarrelling, to send each other back to their proper places, and even in words with which no author at the present day would dare to pollute his pen; but with that exception, each knew how to respect in his fellows the authority of the grand corps of literary men, and the public could not but submit with docility to people who seemed to listen to each other with

such profound respect. No sooner was one enrolled in the caste, than he was entitled to all its honours. When Marmontel, whom we have seen so emphatically praised by the grand master, wrote under a portrait of Rousseau :—

“Sages, behold a portrait limned for you,  
All else, withdraw !—’tis only for the few.”

Rousseau, for it was in 1753, had as yet published only his first discourse. But he was on friendly terms with the chiefs; he promised to be a vigorous champion of the party; and nothing more was wanted in order to his being a great man. *Sages, behold.*

“Is Tacitus or Newton he  
Whom in that smiling brow you see?”

wrote Marmontel further, that same year, under a portrait of d’Alembert. For Marmontel excelled in the art of flattering the chiefs of the squad, and found his advantage in it. The provinces, in case of need, paid the debts of Paris. Marmontel, when at Bordeaux, on visiting the port of that city, had the honour of a salute, and the artillery discharged on that occasion, found echoes even to the extremities of Europe. In 1768, his *Belisarius* was printed in the Russian tongue, and a letter from the Empress to the author announced to him that the translation was by herself, assisted by several noblemen of her court.

In general, with all its talent, the eighteenth century knew not how to assign to authors their true place. It succeeded in this at last, but only after having hailed at the horizon innumerable stars whose lustre hardly lasted for an hour.

We should say, with M. Villemain, that it was the golden age of writers of mediocrity; but indeed, to speak plainly, mediocrity is too honourable a term to apply to the greater number of the men included in that remark. Voltaire had often expressed his surprise and chagrin at this being the case.

"Genius," he would say, "has only one age,\* after which it must needs degenerate." Although such remarks, in his mouth, always supposed an exception in his own favour, they were not the less just. The more the conquests that appeared to him to be made by reason, the more was he struck with perceiving rather decline than progress in everything else.

A great lord, as d'Alembert relates the story,† asked a man of letters how best he might judge of verses. "Always say that they are bad," replied the man of letters, "and the odds are a hundred to one that you will not be in the wrong."

This is an advice which we might almost venture to give to any one in want of a recipe for judging of the eighteenth century. With the exception of about a score of works, say always "*bad*," and you run little risk of being wrong.

Only be it observed, that we do not use the word *bad* here, in the sense of dangerous and immoral, for thus reckoning, there will be found some very bad ones among the twenty that we have excepted, as there would also be found some very good ones among the rest. We speak only of their claims to talent. Instead of bad, if you choose, we might say, valueless.

The Abbé Galiani used to say that there are three sorts of reasonings as well as of resoundings (*raisonnements comme de résonnements*)—of pitchers, of steeple bells, and of men. Pitchers, when there is a mere clatter without either reasoning or eloquence; steeple bells, eloquence without reasoning; man, both eloquence and reasoning. Galiani might have added that the first class is never so numerous as when everybody professes to belong to the third.

Great, accordingly, in the eighteenth century, is the number of good-for-nothing books. As soon as you descend from

\* *Age of Louis XIV.*, ch. xxxii.

† *Dialogue between Poetry and Philosophy*.

those of the first rank, you no longer find ideas, style, substance, or form; you ask yourself at every step, how such wretched stuff could have escaped dying at its birth. Even in the pleasantries—epigrams, songs, and short theatrical pieces—you are confounded at the platitudes which that century could applaud.

Although ours, too, certainly, has its prepossessions and its silly fancies, it must be admitted, we think, that it has a sounder taste. It has, no doubt, continued to make light of morals and all sort of principles; but on the field of talent it has been more difficult to please, and the general level of writers has been notably elevated. Mediocrities abound, but there are fewer nullities. Our poorest writings have all a certain value. If our most renowned writers do not surpass or even equal the illustrious authors of the last century, the rest are incontestably richer in talent, in information, and in mind. It would be hard to find a single work so absolutely valueless as a hundred which one might name among last century's productions.

To what can we ascribe this feebleness? In a great measure, evidently, to the ease with which people contrived to get themselves spoken of for little or nothing. The public tolerated all the interested expressions of admiration lavished on little men by the leaders of parties; it allowed the living to be spoken of in a way that, at other times, would scarcely have been endured in speaking of the most illustrious dead. "One can hardly believe how low admiration has fallen in this age," said Montesquieu, who was one of the most admired.\*

This was too often a freak of the opposite party also. To extravagant eulogiums on the one side, were opposed extravagant eulogiums on the other. When the Marquis de Mira-

\* *Pensées diverses*—(Various Thoughts).

beau set himself, one knows not how, to admire Pompignan : "J. B. Rousseau," he wrote, "had not dared to venture on hymns and prophecies ; this it what M. Le Franc has done with a success that astonishes me, and makes me feel *a shivering, as if at the approach of annihilation.*" Has he to speak of the criticisms of which M. Le Franc had been the object?—"One must distrust," says he, "the levity of these decisions, *as he would a hankering for parricide.*" In fine, after quoting some verses : "Whoever weeps not at these verses," he exclaims, "*will never weep but when he gets a blow with the fist!*" And Pompignan prints all this at the beginning of his works ; and the philosophers enjoy their laugh. They had enough to laugh at ; but what had not they themselves written !

In 1753, when Diderot's *Interpretation of Nature* appeared, let us hear what his friend Grimm said of it : "I hold this work to be so sacred, that I dare not touch it, or attempt to take anything from it, lest I should profane it. I will therefore transcribe nothing out of it ; it must be read and re-read. But I will say to those youths who are disposed to study natural history—See, here is your hand-book : learn it by heart before you advance a step in that science, and never make one without recollecting your master's lessons." A Christian could speak no otherwise of the Gospel.

In 1754, on the occasion of some verses which that same Diderot had taken it into his head to compose : "The author of these verses," we find his friend Grimm again writing, "is a philosopher who has received from the gods a sublime head and an excellent heart ; he is a man whose universal talents are as admirable as his virtues render him respectable to his friends, and who recreates himself from his labours by the graces, the gaiety," &c. And this is called forth by six short lines, very flat, and, still worse, very nasty !

But how could one be sober in their praises towards a man who threw them at your head with all the impetuosity of fanaticism? Diderot made a little better choice, perhaps, of the objects of his admiration; but once that he launched it forth, it was like thunder. The man had been born a fanatic; he admitted this. Every morning he required to have something to burn and something to worship. With this incessant fever on him, did we not know his history, and were we asked if we believed that he loved Richardson, we should say no. The pen that tore the paper it wrote upon, would appear to us too little sister to that which quietly moved over those long volumes. Well, true it is, Diderot loved, and even adored Richardson; he praised him with enthusiasm, nay, with fury. "Since becoming acquainted with Richardson's romances," he wrote, "they have become my touchstone. Those who don't like them are condemned by me. I have never spoken of them to a man whom I esteem without quaking with alarm lest his judgment should not agree with mine. I have never met with a man who shared in my enthusiasm, whom I have not been tempted to clasp in my arms.—And when," he adds, "he was seen absorbed, when interrogated on the subject of his health, or about his family: 'O my friends!' he cried, '*Pamela, Clarissa, and Grandison*, are three grand dramas!'" This was mere burlesque, but it was at least sincere; and so many other admirations were but the results of an audacious policy.

Even beyond the circle, honourable men allowed themselves to be duped into this tone in speaking of it, and carried their incense to the gods of the day. The serious and scientific Tissot, in one of his anatomical treatises,\* called Diderot "that illustrious man whose genius, equally vast, correct, and fertile, seems to have exercised itself in all departments,

\* *Essay on the Mechanism of the Voice.* 1756

only to prove this proposition, so satisfactory for humanity : The universality of talents is found associated with their perfection."

Thus it was that, by dint of assurance, they succeeded not only in preparing for each other, but in getting raised by disinterested hands a pedestal which the public durst no longer venture to shake.

VI.—If they descended from this pedestal to fight with each other, then, as, in the combats of Homer's gods, the crowd, with intent and uneasy curiosity, pressed round the lists where these demigods brought their quarrels to an issue. When the struggle was over, people were angry at themselves for having made it a matter of so much consequence ; but no sooner had a new one commenced, than anew it became the grand affair of the day. See, for example, the world of noise made about the quarrel betwixt Hume and Rousseau. "A declaration of war betwixt two great powers," wrote Grimm, "could not have made more noise at Paris than that quarrel." But he tells us why, and the reason he gives is, in fact, the best : "I said, at Paris ; for at London, where there are more important actors to pillory, the rupture betwixt the ex-citizen of Geneva and the Scottish philosopher has hardly been noticed." It had been more correct to say, that it would have passed altogether without notice in England, but for the noise people made about it in Paris.

Thus, as Grimm already felt, it was mainly to the want of more serious subjects of interest that we must attribute the stir that was caused by such miserable squabbles. "I remember," says Montesquieu, "that I once had the curiosity to count how many times I should hear a trifling story told, which certainly did not deserve being either told or remembered. During the three weeks that it occupied the polite



world, I heard it related two hundred and twenty-five times, *with which I was quite satisfied.*" Well might he be so, for we all know what the art of relating a story must have gained by this prodigious practice. How often did he himself tell this same story? He does not say; but just think to how many conversations this two hundred and twenty-five times assumes he must have listened, and how many drawing-rooms he must have visited in three weeks!

Political life was not, as we shall see elsewhere, as much a nullity as people believe; but, checked as it was in developing itself, and deprived of all direct action on the affairs of the State, it was confined to a kind of fever which necessarily sought a vent for itself somewhere. When people cannot get bull-fights for their amusement, they take to cock-fighting.

In 1752, some Italian singers came to Paris, and performed in public, and forthwith behold all Paris, nay, all France, divided into two camps. The great, the rich, the women, were for French music; the men of letters for the Italian. Betwixt these two camps there was no peace, no truce, no concession of any kind. Mutual accommodation was not to be mentioned. It was idle to say that excellence might be had in music at Paris as well as at Milan or Naples, at Milan or Naples as well as at Paris. One would thus have only incurred the scorn of both parties. Each had to make his option, and, as was required by the law of Solon, in the case of a tumult, had to attach himself to one or other side. But for the men of those times, there was nothing harsh in this necessity. People loved to talk loud, to decide peremptorily. Read Rousseau in his *Letter on Music*, in which he makes it clear as day—ay, he, the applauded author of a pretty French opera—that there is not, that there never has been, and that there never will be a music in France. The excitement went on increasing; all other quarrels were forgotten. So en-

grossed was the public with music, that even those visions of gold, and white bread, with which the economists had begun to dazzle France, were neglected for a time. "All the Romans wanted," wrote Voltaire to M. Necker, "was *panem et circenses*. We have retrenched the *panem*; we are content with the *circenses*—that is to say, the *Opera comique*."

## CHAPTER IV.

- I.—The new ideas run their course—Voltaire the centre of action—In what points we may profit by his example—He maintains unity in the invading army—Minorities always strong ; majorities weak—This the history of all revolutions—Audacity, audacity, audacity—Follies perpetrated on the principle of “ not being behind the age.”
- II.—Was the war really waged with abuses ?—Indulgence shown for scandals in high life—Louis XV.—Louis XIV.—We are bad judges of monarchical habits—The Abbé de Bourbon, son of Louis XV.—Adulation was a language apart—A queen condescending to eat a penny loaf—Adulation became false and ridiculous when assuming philosophical forms—Duclos—Voltaire—Louis XV. the thunderbolt of war—Louis XV. the *well-beloved*—A fresh gush of sentiment.
- III.—People did worse than hold their peace—Louis XV.’s mistresses—Voltaire and Madame de Pompadour—Voltaire and Madame Dubarry—The two kisses—Cardinal Dubois : Fontenelle and Voltaire celebrate his praises—“ After all, he was *un homme d’esprit*.”
- IV.—*Un homme d’esprit*—What was meant by that—A way simultaneously opened to all hypocrisies and all audacities—To die a philosopher—Dubois once more—La Mettrie.

STILL, under shelter of these futilities, the new ideas continued to advance ; and while those who governed the country were doubtless but too happy to see France in the pit applauding or hissing puppets, while it was said in high life, *Let them sing, provided they pay*, the work of demolition went on. In vain did people dream life away, occupied only with trifling quarrels, swelled into seeming importance by this universal indolence. Voltaire was wide awake, and that was enough.

He possessed the art, in fact, of keeping aloof from everything that did not go right to the end in view, and from every

question in which his influence would have been of no real advantage to his work. Of what consequence to him his coming off victorious, in music, over either Italians or French, over a Piccini or a Gluck? Of what consequence to him was a free or restricted corn-trade?—another question in which everybody came at last to take a part. He did not go so far as never to say a word about them, for he found it necessary, for his glory, to continue to be the universal genius; but, in these cases, a few words sufficed. No pledges were given to extreme parties; he knew the importance of pronouncing strong opinions only in matters that were really important. A good lesson this, if we may be allowed to say so, for many men of far higher character, who know not how to make the best use of their powers, waste them on little questions, and are surprised afterwards to find themselves impotent on great ones. Had we at the present day the same vast capacity to employ in the work of reconstruction, that Voltaire possessed for demolition, there would not have been so many ruins on this old soil. What can we expect to be done when all the active minds amongst us consume themselves in demonstrating that the salvation of nations lies in regenerations of detail, good perhaps, but each separately a mere nothing, and which, besides, are capable of being realized only after the regeneration of the whole? Each persists in seeing a remedy for all evils in the practical adoption of his own plan; and all these plans, one after another, prove abortive, without even effecting the small amount of good which they were capable of producing. Voltaire, when he would kill, struck at the heart; let none hope to restore life to the body by merely heating the limbs.

Another point in which he excelled, was in maintaining unity in that numerous phalanx, in which, thanks to him, so many men, who in other times would have had nothing in

common, advanced side by side. In this lies the force of enterprising minorities; this is what has ever been wanting in honourable majorities. These are horrified at the idea of abdicating into the hands of a chief, and yet they do abdicate, in fact, before every less scrupulous minority. Each of their component members, says he, wishes to remain free, and sees not that in so doing, he is but putting himself and his followers under the yoke. A minority, often a very small one, carries the day, and then augments its numbers by the adhesion of all who think success sufficient to demonstrate the goodness of a cause.

Such is the history of all revolutions, ancient and modern, past and to come. It is minorities that make them, because it is in minorities, as we have said, that people feel the necessity of obeying, in order to arrive at command. In majorities, people glory in not following the torrent; in minorities, whoever quits his place is marked as a traitor. Allow them to embolden themselves, and they will pronounce it treason, not only for a man to detach himself from them, but even not to attach himself to them. We have seen some imperceptibly small minorities, haughtily hurl an anathema at a whole country. Thousands, and even millions of citizens, have heard themselves called traitors to their country by a handful of unknown persons, who have thought good to personify the country in themselves; and, what is sadder still, many have in such circumstances not even dreamt of protesting. Can any one wonder, after this, at the confidence with which revolutionists repeat to one another, that all they want is "audacity, audacity, and still audacity!"

Often, too, we see a majority freely put its hand to what it neither wishes nor approves, but which, it has been told, is among the wants, and according to the spirit of the age. Just as such or such a fashion has prevailed in dress, without any one

thinking it either convenient or elegant, so also, in laws and in morals, such or such a change has been made, because a single man has preached it; not because it is good, and perhaps even while declaring it uncomfortable, but withal necessary, and, in short, inevitable. He has not converted his fellow-citizens to this idea, but he has believed, and he has made them believe, that it was what the time required, and so they have received it, as he himself has done, with a slavish submission. What that man has done honestly, others, as a matter of course, will do from interested motives, as shop-keepers do with the fashions. They will demand in the name of the age all that they could never have hoped to obtain otherwise, and one may see individuals and nations—*not to be behind the age*, that is the phrase—cast off the most precious relics of a glorious or a sagacious past.

The wish of the age is nevertheless, in reality, but that of the individuals who happen to be met at one and the same time in the world. Were every one, before succumbing to what he has been told is the wish of all, to ask himself with a little seriousness, what is his own particular wish, many things that appear to be desired by all, will be found desired only by some. But nations and ages are like individuals; no sooner do men set about persuading them that they are ill, than they begin to be really ill.

II.—These remarks, at a first view, seem little applicable to the France of the eighteenth century, which, assuredly, was far from being in a healthy state. But are we sure that it was to its true sores that men's regards were most strongly directed? Was it really upon abuses that they made war?

There were many abuses they never dreamt of noticing. And many of the most scandalous, were not only not made objects of public reprehension, but, at need, were even encouraged.

To begin with the scandals of the throne ; let us be told, we do not say of a single Encyclopædist, that ever found himself thrown into the Bastile, for having generously denounced them, but of a single page of their writings which expresses a plain and energetic disapproval of them ; where, in short, we see them call forth the honest indignation of the author. Here and there you will find allusions, generally of a playful kind ; but indignation never.

Shall we be told that the writers of the times of Louis XIV. preserved a still more unbroken silence on the subject of his disorders ? True ; but they had a profound reverence for the king and the royal authority. Their silence was that of respect. They did not constitute themselves the redressers of mankind ; they made no affectation of being proof against the general fascination. But was there any fascination under Louis XV. ? And when people were shaking the king's throne, was it from respect that they said nothing about his vices ?

It is true that we are bad judges, we, children of the revolution, of things that formed part of the old monarchical worship, even in its weakened state.

In 1776, several cardinals and twenty bishops were present, in the seminary Saint-Magloire, at the delivery of a public exercise by the young Abbé de Bourbon, son of Louis XV. by a Madame de Carcinac. Now, Louis XV. was at this time dead ; his successor was a person of severe morality, and it could not be with the view of paying court to him that those prelates went to pay court to a bastard inheritor of the name of Bourbon. Such a step, then, had nothing scandalous in it in their eyes, and we cannot pronounce upon it strictly according to what it would be at the present day.

It is, further, true that adulation continued, as it were, a second form of politeness, that is to say, that its language, not being understood literally, by no means said all that we, who

no longer either use or hear it, see in it. One might say, accordingly, many untrue things without being guilty of falsehood; one might use formal expressions that seem strange to us, and yet, from the very circumstance of their being formal, shocked nobody. In 1768, at the death of the queen, M. de Clairfontaine published her panegyric, and, recalling the fact of her having passed through *La Ferté-sous-Jouarre* in 1765: "Having stopped," he says, "under an alley of trees leading into the town, she was presented, according to custom, with bread and wine. The queen took a small roll, broke it in two, and ate it along with some of the fruits of the season. Everybody was penetrated with this act of goodness, and the town has entered on its records this event, so flattering and so honourable." Had a goddess appeared on the earth, it would have been impossible to say more.

Let us not, then, be too severe in reproaching the innovators of that age for having, on certain occasions, employed that ancient language; but what was inexcusable, and what amounted to downright lying, was their giving it new charms by mingling with it the language of philosophy; and praising, in the name of reason, what people used to praise, at least down to their time, only by routine. Racine, calling Louis XIV. "the most perfect of men,"\* shocks us less than Duclos calling Louis XV. "citizen king."† Boileau befooling himself to tell us that though Louis XIV. had not passed the Rhine, he was not the less a hero, was certainly less mendacious than the man who represented Louis XV. as "arresting, almost alone, the march of an army." Why is the falsehood more serious in this case? Because Voltaire—for it is he—gives himself out in that very passage as a historian, and professes to have said nothing without proofs. "Our contemporary and faithful annals," says he, "attest this prodigy."

\* Discourse to the Academy.

† Ibid.



Which nevertheless does not prevent him from admitting, in his *Summary of the Age of Louis XV.*, that the bridge on which "this prodigy" took place was mounted with cannons, and defended by numerous troops.

It was in 1749, in a eulogium on Saint Louis, that he had given this extraordinary example of philosophical adulation. A panegyric on Louis XV., published by him that same year, might furnish us with many more. Philosophical pretension reveals itself in the very title. The work is dedicated "to Louis XV., who has deserved well *of the human race*."\* "Our acclamations," says the author, "have given to that prince a title† which ought to be held as equivalent to many other titles in him." And would you know what he himself has said elsewhere of this title, of which he has made so much in the above panegyric? "A wag of the name of Vadé,‡ imagined, when in a wine-shop at Courtille, the title of *Well-beloved*, which the people of Paris, no less besotted than those of Metz, gave to Louis XV., and all for having sent away Madame de Chateauroux." On learning that people had given him this title—"What then have I done to make myself thus beloved?" the king himself is said to have exclaimed, and certainly he did himself justice. But the panegyrist did not look so narrowly into the matter. "Because he was beloved," says he, "he deserved to be so. One may be deceived in his admiration, one may mistake fortune for merit; but when a people love to distraction, can they be in the wrong? The heart of the prince was sensible of what was involved in this cry of the nation; the universal dread of losing a good king, imposed on him the

\* *Ludovico quinto decimo, de humano genere bene merito.*

† That of *Bien-aimé*—(Well-beloved).

‡ It seems that it was rather Panard, but in a wine-shop, for he passed his life there.

necessity of being the best of kings." Of his disorders, not a word. One could hardly speak of them in a panegyric; but no more were they spoken of elsewhere.

III.—But, as we have already remarked, people did worse than merely hold their peace. Louis XV.'s mistresses had the *Encyclopédie* at their feet. That advancing wave which respected nothing, paused, with a humble and courteous deference, before adultery enthroned at the fireside of the King of France. History even took alarm when the past might displease the present. In sending to the Duke de Richelieu a copy of the *Age of Louis XIV.*, "I flatter myself," writes Voltaire, "that if the king had time to read this work, he would not be displeased with it. I believe, in particular, that Madame de Pompadour might not disapprove of the manner in which I speak of Mesdames de la Vallière, de Montespan, and de Maintenon." But it was long since Madame de Pompadour could reckon on him. From the very dawn of her power, he had hailed her rise with his most graceful verses; had openly claimed the honour of being her admirer, her knight, her poet. He may have given her in his *Pucelle* a slight pat of his paw; but the *Pucelle* was an anonymous work, one which he disowned and repudiated, whereas his praises were presented before all Europe. In 1760, he dedicated his *Tancred* to her. On her dying bed she was soothed with the homage he paid to her; and the woman, despicable in a very different way, who succeeded her in the royal favour, became in her turn the muse of the Ferney patriarch, reviving, at the mature age of eighty, all the poetical fervour of his early days. Not a word, even in his private letters, in reprobation of that prostituting of the sceptre in the hands of a shameless courtesan. He seems happy, nay proud, in the consciousness of enjoying her

favour. "Madam," he writes in 1773, "M. de Laborde\* tells me you commanded him to salute me for you on both cheeks:—

"What! eh! two kisses at life's very end!  
O what a passport this you deign to send!  
Adorable Egeria, their sweets are such,  
That the first kills me, so there's one too much."

"M. de Laborde," he continues, "has shown me your portrait. Don't be angry, Madam, at my having used the freedom to give back the two kisses to it.

"To men possessing eyes, you can't say nay,  
When homage to your portrait they would pay.  
To it alone dare mortals show their love,  
The original was made for gods above."

She, in fact, was beautiful, and beauty has ever secured indulgence for many faults; but if there be in this any excuse for the adulations of that time, can it be said that at least more severity was shown to vice when utterly without attractions of that sort? Indulgent to a Dubarry, what do we find those sages to have been to others, and, for example, to Cardinal Dubois?

We shall not inquire what flatteries were lavished on him during his lifetime, although nothing was more notorious than not only the turpitude of his private life, but the reckless intrigues also of his ambition. Let us forget the homage paid by Fontenelle, and the verses in which Voltaire, in 1719, called him the Richelieu of his age, and the genius of France, for we should have to quote also certain deplorable lines traced by very different hands.† But this same Voltaire, more than

\* First *valet-de-chambre* of Louis XV., and author of several works.

† "My verses," wrote Louis Racine to him, "will soon be forgotten. Those who have the talent of writing fine verses find at present enough of subjects procured to them by your Eminence, and your ministry will doubtless cause many waking hours to the poets." In fact, the collections of those times are full of verses on his being raised to the dignity of prime minister, of cardinal, &c. The verse which the son of the great Racine resigned himself with such humility to see pass into oblivion amid panegyrics to the atheist and rapacious minister, was his poem on *Grace*.

fifty years afterwards, though he no longer praised him, must not be thought to have become at all more indignant. In his *Summary of the Age of Louis XV.*, after having jocularly related what Dubois was and what he did: "Had that cardinal premier," says he, "been a grave personage, this fortune would have made people indignant; as it was, it only made them smile. We laughed at his death as we had laughed at his ministry. Such was the taste of the French, accustomed as they are to laugh at everything." They had laughed, it is true, but still not universally. Witness more than one page of the *Memoirs of St. Simon*; but, because people had laughed in 1723, was it a matter of course that they should laugh in 1770? Was there any need for giving popularity to that idea, that the worst that can happen to an infamous man is his being laughed at? But Dubois had two great claims to the indulgence of the moralists of the day, and again it is Voltaire, in his *History of the Parliament of Paris*, who has given us the finishing touch, when he says: "Dubois died a philosopher, and was, after all, a man of wit."

IV.—Here we behold the two points by which all life was tried. But the man of wit (*l'homme d'esprit*), in this sense, was not the witty man (*l'homme spirituel*).<sup>\*</sup> Witty! your claim to wit might be small indeed, and yet you might pass triumphantly into the rank of the wise; it might be very great, while you remained, in the eyes of the coterie, a silly fellow.

The man of wit (*l'homme d'esprit*) was essentially he that threw off the yoke of common ideas, of the good, of course,

<sup>\*</sup> The antithesis here between *l'homme d'esprit* and *l'homme spirituel* is utterly incapable of being transferred into the English tongue, and forms a singular example of the intimate connexion between a nation's character and language. *L'homme d'esprit* might be translated *clever fellow, smart fellow, free-thinker*; in short, it expresses the moral tone rather than the intellectual qualities of a man. *L'homme spirituel*, again, seems to find its best expression in English, in the terms *lively* and *ingenious*, or, if you will, *witty*.—*Trans.*

much more than of the bad. The man of wit, for example, was not only quite an infidel, but he was one who, in spite of his infidelity, contrived to submit, in case of need, to what he laughed at in his sleeve, like Voltaire when he went to mass, or when he kept his Lent.\* The man of wit was he who kept on good terms both with the Court and with the patriots; he was the magistrate who threw off the old judicial austerity, the doctor of the Sorbonne, who laughed at theological disputes, the preacher who contrived to compose a sermon without a word of Christianity in it; the husband who knew how to shut his eyes to the irregularities of his wife, or, better still, to profit by them. The way was wide, it will be seen. All these, whatever their lives may have been, had the same funeral oration awaiting them at their death, in these complaisant annals. "He was, after all, *un homme d'esprit*."

But I was forgetting. It was further necessary that they should die "philosophers;" and this expression, too, has a new meaning. You imagine, perhaps, that it means dying an infidel, but calm and resigned. Not at all. "Dubois died swearing; I don't say like a heathen, for the heathen did not swear—but like a madman; yet he died," says Voltaire, "a philosopher." When La Mettrie, at Berlin, died of an indigestion—"The king"—it is Voltaire who still speaks—"had himself most exactly informed of the manner in which he died, and it was clearly shown that this gourmand died a philosopher."† This put them quite at ease as to his state, and secured him a place in their Pantheon.

\* "Had I a hundred thousand men, I well know what I would do; but as I have not, I mean to communicate at Easter, and you may call me hypocrite as much as you please."—Letter to D'Argental, 1761. "What ought wise men to do when surrounded by insensate barbarians? There are times when we should imitate their contortions. What I have done this year is what I have done many times. There are some people who are afraid to touch spiders; there are others who swallow them."—Letter to D'Alembert. 1768.

† Letter to Madame Denis, 1751.

## CHAPTER V.

- I.—Same principles in historical works—Errors propagated out of hatred to Christianity and Judaism—Cruelties excused or counselled—Ruthless explanation of the hatred of which the Jews have been the object—Voltaire absolves and praises in the past what would be revolting at present.—II.—He re-fashions, after his own manner, the history of the persecutions of the first age—It required re-fashioning, but learning and honesty were necessary—The pagans, according to him, never persecuted religious beliefs—Nero—Diocletian and his edict—Theodosius—The Jesuit Malagrida—Joy first, and horror afterwards—Constantine—Clovis—Charlemagne.—III.—Julian—Worship vowed to him by Voltaire—Ridiculous exaggerations—Voltaire ends with believing them—What Julian really was—Voltaire's admissions.
- IV.—Eulogies bestowed on paganism itself—Voltaire's efforts to excuse its absurdities—His contradictions on the subject of the Mahometans, the Hindoos, and the Persians.—V.—The Chinese—*The privilege of travellers to tell lies*—The art of repetition—The Abbé St Pierre—Voltaire: how his assertions and jests became reasons—History of his admiration for the Chinese—The accounts sent by the Jesuits—Confucius and Zoroaster—Admissions and fresh untruths.
- VI.—The art of lying—The object for which, according to Voltaire, it ought to be exercised—Grimm—Catherine—People laughed in their sleeve at Voltaire's lies, still they repeated them—The lies of that day and those of the present—Object and form altered; the substance often worse.

THESE principles, which we see them carry with so undisguised a hardihood into the appreciation of the facts and of the men of their times, occur again, on a great scale, in all the historical works of the Voltairian school. Men and facts, all are tried there, as viewed in the light of the services rendered and the embarrassments caused to *philosophy*, always in the new meaning of that word.

Thus, out of hatred to Christianity, the cruelties resorted to by paganism in order to check its progress, we shall find excused, understated, or denied, as the occasion may require.

Out of hatred to Judaism, in which Christianity has its roots, not only were the old calamities of the Jewish people to be applauded, but those old popular enmities, of which the Jews have so often been the victims, were to be fomented anew, and without remorse. The best-established facts in their history were to be rejected, and the most odious and absurd calumnies ever invented at their expense, were to be reproduced. According to Voltaire,\* they massacred, in the reign of Trajan, in Cyrene and the island of Cyprus, *more than two hundred thousand persons*. "They were punished," he adds, "but not so severely as they deserved, *since they still subsist*." Here we see him express his regret that the crime of some, in a corner of the empire, was not followed by the extermination of all. Elsewhere,† in relating the frightful cruelties exercised against them in Spain, in the fifteenth century: "No one," says he, "could pity them, for they had enriched themselves too much; they had ruined the country." See how he excuses the *autos-da-fé*, the massacres, the annihilation of a whole people, because there were usurers among them. But the Jews were that people. Was it even on that account necessary to impute crimes to them? Their legislation, according to him, sufficiently explains and justifies all the persecutions they have endured. "You are struck,"‡ says he, "with the hatred and with the contempt which all nations have ever entertained for the Jews. It is the inevitable consequence of their legislation. There was no middle course betwixt their subjugating everything and being crushed themselves." Where had he seen this? Their legislation, it is true, isolated them from other people; but this itself prevented them, after being once established in Palestine, from

\* *Conspirations contre les peuples*—(Conspiracies against the nations).

† *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*—(Essay on the manners and spirit of nations).

‡ *Ibid.*

becoming a conquering people ; and if the Babylonians enslaved them, and if the Romans overwhelmed them, we do not see that this was owing, in the very least, to any such alleged spirit of encroachment. No matter. "They were with reason treated as a nation opposed in everything to others." What plainer or clearer than this? When a nation shall be found, in religion and morals, opposed to other nations, it is *with reason* that the others proceed to hate and exterminate it.

Voltaire, I am sensible, did not mean to lay down this as a settled principle. That very extermination which he seems to hold legitimate, he would, in the case of its being attempted, have opposed with the utmost indignation ; but nothing seemed too bad when he wanted to vilify, at least on paper, the original sources of a religion which he detested. What would have horrified him in his own day, he absolves and even praises in the past, in the case of every one who detested that religion as he did.

II.—Thus was it that he came to recast, in his own way, the history of the persecutions which Christianity had to undergo.

True, there was something here to retrench. Christian historians have often been wanting in critical acumen, and have related the early annals of the Church as Livy relates those of Rome, registering mere traditions, and arranging and amplifying at will. Then, as the Church herself persecuted, it was needful, in order to avoid disquieting comparisons, that she should be found to have suffered more than she had caused others to suffer.

But Voltaire cares little about details. For the task of analysing these, and rigorously sifting the true from the false, was required an amount of erudition which he did not possess,



together with a conscientiousness and a solicitude to which he has made us little accustomed. He will be found to keep to generalities. He lays down axiomatically one or two facts, and with these proceeds to disembarass himself of all the rest.

Thus, according to him, the pagans never persecuted beliefs. Ask him not to distinguish betwixt pagan beliefs—which mutually tolerated each other, in point of fact, with an extreme complaisance—and the Christian beliefs, which they could not tolerate. No. The pagans, he will have it, had no ill-will to Christianity on the score of doctrine. If they persecuted the Christians, it was only because they were seditious subjects and rebels.

But did they really persecute them? He durst not say no, but he never says yes. It was the Jews who, under Nero, accused the Christians of burning Rome, and “some hapless persons were abandoned to the public vengeance.”\* He has always some reason to show that the pagans had no wish to persecute, that it was the Christians that made persecution indispensable. “It is evident,” we find him say,† “that if the clergy of Nicomedia had never picked a quarrel with the footmen of the Cesar Galerius, and that if an insolent enthusiast had not torn down the edict of Diocletian, never would that emperor, until then so mild, and the husband of a Christian wife, have permitted the persecution that broke forth during the two last years of his reign.” Here there is but one difficulty: it is, that the persecution, as Voltaire will have it, arose from a Christian’s having torn down the edict; while the edict so torn down, as history has it, was just the edict ordering the persecution. Next, granting that to have been the true cause, what logic and what humanity in the appre-

\* *Essai sur les Mœurs*—(Essay on Manners).

† *Lettres Chinoises, Indiennes, et Tartares*—(Chinese, Indian, and Tartar Letters).

ciation of the results! Millions of Christians are about to be persecuted. So much the worse for them. Why should there have been found one of them who could tear down the edict? Why should about a dozen of them have picked a quarrel with the footmen of Galerius? Diocletian was a good man; but after such crimes, committed at Nicomedia, he could no longer reasonably prevent people persecuting the Christians throughout the whole empire. Be it well understood, that Theodosius, who nevertheless was cruel only to the city in which he had been insulted, was not the less a monster unworthy of the name of man. But Theodosius was a Christian.

It might even happen, that the same fact should appear to him innocent or execrable, according as the authors were or were not his friends. In 1759, and in 1761, he speaks with the utmost delight of the cruel treatment, in Portugal, of some Jesuits: "It is said that the Rev. Father Malagrida has been broken on the wheel. God be praised!"\* "I have a letter saying that three Jesuits have at length been burnt at Lisbon. This is very consolatory news."† Then, again, all of a sudden, he is in a transport of indignation. People led to the stake in the eighteenth century! He is ready to burst into tears about this poor Malagrida.‡ What, then, had occurred to make him change? He had heard that Malagrida had been condemned by the Inquisition. Pombal might burn them to his heart's content—he was a philosopher, and had had several of Voltaire's works translated into Portuguese; but had he been a Christian, he would, like Theodosius, have been no better than a monster.

This, for the rest, is the invariable opinion entertained by Voltaire of the first Christian princes, and of all who ever

\* Lettre à la Comtesse de Lutzelbourg.

† Lettre à M. Verres.

‡ Lettre au Duc de Richelieu. Decembre 1761.

contributed to the progress of Christianity. Constantine, Clovis, Charlemagne—all were wretched creatures, stupidly lauded by the Christians. Even in a note which occurs in the *Age of Louis XIV.*, where he is ordinarily more reserved, he speaks of Constantine, Theodosius, and *some other blackguards (scélérats) of the Lower Empire.*

III.—But all the glory of which he seeks to rob those men—whom the Christians have indeed praised too highly—he persists in transferring to the enemies of Christianity. Julian, whom of all others the Church has held most in horror, is the hero of his predilection. He will have him to have been the best, the wisest, the greatest, the most just, the most valiant, the most astonishing of monarchs. He considers that he has said everything in praise of a prince when he has called him a Julian, and it is the first name that he bestows on his other hero, Frederick (of Prussia). In his serious works, in his pamphlets, in his letters, in verse and in prose, we find Julian perpetually re-occurring. He seems to kneel before his memory; he would weep, would you let him, with admiration and gratitude. “One weeps,” he writes,\* “with profound feeling, when one thinks of all the good he has done us.” Does the ungrateful reader ask what great good he has done us? M. de Voltaire will tell him that he governed the Gauls, and that possibly he conducted himself tolerably well when there; and thereupon we find him tuning his lyre to praise the marvels of Julian’s government: “He lived among us as a citizen, as a hero, as a philosopher, as a father. He administered justice like a Lamoignon; he fought for us like a Turenne; he managed the finances like a Rosni (de Sully).”† Afterwards, we find Voltaire applauding himself on perceiving that some folks had begun to believe these fine things; and he

\* *Fragments sur l'Histoire.*

† *Ibid.*

himself, by dint of repeating them, gave them at last some small credence. The whitewashing of the Apostate became one of the grand objects for which he lived. He thunders forth his indignation at the slightest doubt thrown on the virtues of the incomparable emperor; he grows savage at the mere word *apostate*,\* as if it were aught else but the simple enunciation of the very thing that he praises him for. Within two months of his death, in congratulating himself on the destructions for which France did him homage—"I should not despair," he says, in writing to the King of Prussia, "of getting a panegyric on the Emperor Julian delivered in the course of a month."

Julian, nevertheless, in quitting Christianity, was far from devoting himself to the worship of reason. It was paganism which he undertook to restore to its supremacy—not the paganism of Socrates, but that of ignoramuses and cheats; paganism, in fact, with all its former follies and all its former turpitudes. This we might learn from Voltaire himself, had we no other means of knowing it; for he was not afraid of being sometimes sincere, sure as he was of returning to his mendacity with the same ease, and of being listened to with the same readiness. "Julian," we find him accordingly writing in 1764, "was devoted to all the fanaticism of the Eclectic philosophy. He went into all the excesses of superstition. Had he returned victorious from his expedition against the Parthians, there would have been a scarcity, it was said, of victims, so many had he slaughtered, whether with the view of reading the signs presented by their entrails, or to propitiate the gods. Like Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblicus, he boasted of having immediate intercourse with the celestial intelligences." Let us add, what Voltaire also half admits, that

\* "Such is the man whom a low fellow dares to call Julian the Apostate!"—*Fragments sur l'Histoire*.

this model of wisdom organized against Christianity a system of persecution, in which blood, it is true, did not flow, but one, withal, more general and more obstinate than had ever been known before.

Elsewhere,\* as an excuse for him, Voltaire argues that he was impelled to it by political necessities. "Had he not shown great zeal for his party, that party would have abandoned him." Elsewhere† still, he says:—"Julian the philosopher condescended to submit to this expiation in order to conciliate the priests of the Gentiles." Thus, at last, it is only by convicting him of hypocrisy and falsehood that he can be exculpated from having believed in the follies he practised. After the admissions of his panegyrist, Julian remains either the greatest of bigots or the greatest of hypocrites among pagans. But he hated Christianity; that was enough. Hypocrite or bigot, not the less will he continue to be the greatest of princes and the model of all the virtues. "There has never been after him a prince more worthy of governing men," Montesquieu also had said; so easy, and, in some sort, so much a matter of obligation, was lying in that age, even for men who, if not the most serious, sought most to be so!

IV.—Often, moreover, it is not only to pagans, but to paganism itself, that we find Voltaire address his flatteries. As a matter of course, you find him likewise, on occasions, make merry with the pagan superstitions; but the moment that Christianity and Christians come upon the scene, everything is beautiful when compared with their tenets.

How careful is he, first of all, to clear the pagans of the reproach of having believed in absurd divinities! He thinks

\* *Fragments sur l'Histoire*—(Fragments on History).

† *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, art. *Taurobole*—(Philosophical Dictionary, art. *Taurobole*).

it not enough to demonstrate, what is true, that their sages did not believe in them; he will have it that the vulgar themselves may have had, at bottom, the same reasonable and pure sentiments. Anathema to whosoever should maintain that so learned and so wise a people as the Egyptians, and who deserved so well of mankind, were it for nothing but their having hated and persecuted the Jews, worshipped an ox, a crocodile, an onion! It was to God, according to Voltaire,\* and to God alone, that they gave their homage. Say not, on the faith of historians, that the ancient Germans, in their forests, practised atrocious religious rites: "They worshipped God under other names, other emblems, other rites."† Christianity, therefore, gave them nothing good that they did not possess already, and brought on them a thousand evils that they never had before.

Voltaire is a little less at his ease with the Mahometans. As the foes of Christianity, they possess his entire affection; as the followers of a code which has borrowed largely from Moses and the Gospel, they are no better than fanatics and fools. Mahomet, who threw down the cross at Constantinople, is "the most enlightened prince of his time—the most magnificent rewarder of the arts."‡ But whilst, if we are to believe him, the sacred books of the Hindoos and Persians are models of perfection, the Alcoran, which comes nearer to the Bible, is a mere tissue of falsehoods and follies.

V.—But no people enjoyed more decided favour with him and his whole school than the Chinese.

It is the traveller's privilege, says the proverb, to tell lies. Voltaire did not come from China, but he well knew that his readers would not go there to test his assertions. Did he

\* *Le Pyrrhonisme de l'Histoire*—(The Pyrrhonism of History).

† *Fragments de l'Histoire*—(Fragments of History).

‡ *Ibid.*

come to be convicted of falsehood, you will find him do what he always did in such a case—he will tell fresh lies! Too many were interested in believing him, for his assertions not to enter at last, in part at least, into the historical baggage of his age.

The art of repetition is, at certain times, an infallible weapon. "You have told us all that some five or six times already," some one used to say to the Abbé St. Pierre. "Just as I ought," he replied, "for I see you remember it." But the abbé was calm, impartial, vague. It was idle for him to force people to retain such or such of his ideas; he was none the more powerful for that. But it was always on some irritable fibre that Voltaire made his invariable assertions to pass and repass. Art even was not necessary to him. He has, no doubt, thrown an immensity of it into his innumerable pamphlets, in which the uniformity of the substance disappears, at the first view, under their taking titles, the unexpected novelty of their forms, and their mobility of style. But how often, after all, do we find the same ideas re-occurring under the same turns of expression, the same words, perhaps, and the same jokes. Well, all this told on the public. Each repetition of those rash assertions held the place of a proof in their favour; and those jokes, contrary to what ordinarily happens, produced more effect on their second than on their first appearance, more on the third than on the second. One would have said, that in proportion to their becoming stale as jokes, they became effective as reasons. Voltaire well knew that he gave himself the air of a dotard, and that his enemies scoffed at him; but what cared he for that? He was sure to have the last laugh. Events have shown that if those obstinate repetitions did not proceed from a man very solicitous about his personal dignity as a philosopher, they were a proof at least of his profound political skill.

China, then, according to him, was an admirable country, where, without Christianity, or rather thanks to its absence, there had been all those advances in civilization which are ascribed to it elsewhere, and a great many besides which it is incapable of operating. In China he represents laws, morals, administration, everything, as wise, and such as may well put Christian governments to the blush. Its religion, pure deism, is what would put an end to all the woes and to all the quarrels of Europe. That religion, moreover—and this is its especial merit—is of such antiquity as to subvert the whole Mosaic chronology, consequently the entire Old Testament, and along with it the New.

A droll enough circumstance appears in this picture; it was in the accounts written by the Jesuits that Voltaire went to look for the most of those features; and it must be confessed, that the good Fathers, with very different views, had made the task sufficiently easy. Alone admitted into the interior of China, they had amplified at pleasure the marvels of a country of which they had conceived they were on the point of making themselves masters; and it was in this instance that Voltaire, the grand sceptic, believed with a desperate docility.

Thus, he whose jests were inexhaustible on the wealth attributed to Solomon, unhesitatingly gives the Emperor of China a revenue of more than four hundred millions sterling, a cavalry of five hundred thousand horses, and, in fine, a total number of from fifty to sixty millions of men capable of bearing arms.\* Sovereign of the greatest population ever united under one sceptre, this prince, he will have it, reigns not the less as a father, accessible, humane, deeply impressed with the equality of mankind, a philosopher, a sage, a Julian! Voltaire seems not even to suspect it possible, that on this throne there may be succession without resemblance. With him the

\* *Dialogues entre A., B., C., xxvii.*



Emperor of China is a changeless being, always good and always wise, incapable of being spoilt except by becoming a Christian.

Confucius and Zoroaster, in fact, always, according to Voltaire, were very different men from Moses and the Apostles. Sometimes, indeed, we shall find him calling them quacks, as in the passage where he adds, "that they would not at this day sell their drugs on the Pont-Neuf."\* He will even go so far as to say that "one cannot read the abominable trash attributed to Zoroaster without pitying human nature," and that "Nostradamus is reasonable in comparison" with him. But let the antichristian question be once started, and those *charlatans* will be found to have recovered at once their claims to his respect.

VI.—Further, it is from himself we shall learn, if we choose, the secret of those tactics—secret, yet withal sufficiently patent.

"We are told," says he,† "of the atrocities of many of the princes of Asia. Travellers speak without reserve of all they have heard people say in Turkey and in Persia. I could have wished, had I been in their place, to lie in quite a different way. I would have taken care never to see any but just and merciful princes, judges unswayed by passion, and disinterested financiers; and these I would have presented as models to the governments of Europe." Thus, what he does for the Chinese is merely what he tells us he would have wished to do, had he travelled with Tavernier and d'Anville.

Mark, again, what Grimm‡ says:—"Philosophers have laid hold of the subject, and have made it, as they usually do, extremely serviceable in their powerful assaults on the abuses

\* *Dictionnaire Philosophique.*

† *Le Pyrrhonisme de l'Histoire.*

‡ *Correspondence*, 1768.

they have wished to destroy in their own country. After that, the blockheads of the press imitated the notes of the philosophers." Here the distinction between philosophers and blockheads is somewhat nice.

"By means of the affairs I have with the Chinese government," the Empress Catherine wrote to Voltaire, "I might supply some notions with respect to their practical wisdom that would destroy much of the high opinion that has been formed of it, and that would make them appear ignorant clowns. But one ought not to hurt his neighbour," she adds. And she did not care, in fact, to publish those documents in which their patron would have found more matter of annoyance than themselves.

There was some little laughter, it is true, among the initiated, at the oft-told tales of the patriarch about his good friends the Chinese. "Don't you see, then, I said to the Abbé Pauw, that M. de Voltaire follows the example of Tacitus? That Roman, to animate his compatriots to virtue, proposed to them, as models of candour and frugality, our ancient Germans, who certainly did not at that time deserve to be imitated by anybody. In like manner, M. de Voltaire labours to say to his countrymen, 'Learn from the Chinese to recompense virtuous actions. Like them, encourage agriculture and you will see your barren tracts of Bordeaux and your scurvy Champagne producing abundant harvests. Make mandarins of your Encyclopædists, and you shall be well governed.'"

Thus wrote the King of Prussia, in a letter to Voltaire himself; and after having stated, half in jest, half in earnest, the objections to which these tactics are obnoxious, "It seems to me, then," he goes on to say, "that your dispute comes at last to this: Is it allowable to employ lies in order to effect good ends? On this question, opinions will always differ."

Is this true? Shall we always have people who will lie

without scruple, from the moment that the interest of their cause seems to demand it? What is but too certain is, that the number of such has not diminished since the days of Voltaire. More good faith is shown in historical labours; but not a whit more in the discussions of the day. The sole difference, and it is hardly to our credit, is, that if one lies a little less for theories, and for ideas, personal interest is habitually much more the stake that is played for in all the untruths which people allow themselves to indulge.

In short, all the features we have had to note in this episode of the struggles of the eighteenth century, will be found re-occurring in the struggles of the present day. Just as then, we find men who have long since lost character, taking their places on the altars that party spirit erects and furnishes; just as then, after having begun, through pure bad faith, to bring their names into notice for the mere purpose of employing them as a weapon against others, people come to be almost sincere in the homage that is paid to them; just as then, people honour them in spite of what they hear said to their discredit, nay, in spite of what they themselves say against them in private. They are needed, and this is enough to induce people to patronize them. Every idea seems to seek to embody itself in a name, and there is no name so vile that certain men are not prepared, if their interest demands it, to turn it into a symbol or a war-cry.

## CHAPTER VI.

- I.—Catherine II.—Her infidelity the sole motive for the eulogies bestowed on her—One fault of hers—Voltaire's scruples and indignation—Speedy change followed by idolatry—Pensioned infidelity—The new saint and the old ones—Semiramis—That late gentleman her husband—Voltaire's zeal—The five-and-twenty bob-wigs of Geneva—*A Te Deum*—Christ would have lied—How pitiful all this.
- II.—The philosophers and war—Good ideas and right sentiments in point of theory—Original forms with which Voltaire invests them—What this becomes in practice—All is idle breath when the heart is wanting—The love of humanity was rare—People spoke only when they had to make a noise—The Protestants—Calas—Lally—*Quodlibets* at first, and indignation afterwards.
- III.—War and conquests—A friend of the philosophers could not be in the wrong—No shame felt at changing one's tone—Silesia—King of Prussia's admissions—The *anti-Machiavel*—Voltaire can only jest at the evils of war—An excuse according to the usual custom of all conquerors—Humanity in rhymes—"Your Majesty makes a jest of the world"—The robber and his beads.—IV.—Voltaire a homicide—His war machine—He proposes it to the Duke de Richelieu and the Empress of Russia—War alternately anathematized and counselled—No principle, no serious feelings.—V.—Folly and fatalism—No pity for the vanquished—Montesquieu and Rousseau, on this point, agree with Voltaire—Some instances.—VI.—Voltaire and Geneva; eulogies and treason—Poland—The circle is the most perfect figure—Voltaire counsels and celebrates the partition—Odious sarcasms.
- VII.—What was the meaning of a man's country with the thinkers of that time? Rousseau no exception—What, in reality, did his love for Geneva amount to?—*Montagne's Letters*—Love on system, and then hatred.

THIS same Empress, who, out of regard for Voltaire, would not divulge what she knew to be wrong among the Chinese, we find sharing with them, and with the King of Prussia, in the admiration of the first writers of the time. Buffon calls her "a celestial head worthy of governing the entire world."\* Grimm wrote†—"She is the soul of the

\* Letter to herself.

† *Correspondence*, 1768.

universe, who knows how to animate everything at once;" and this because she had sent some furs to the principal actors at the *Comédie Française* theatre!

What, then, had she done, that, on the occasion of her simplest actions, she should be lauded in this tone? One thing only, but that was tantamount to all the virtues—she professed herself an infidel;\* she had taken under her distant patronage all the men and all the books that battled for infidelity. A stranger, besides, both in her private conduct and in public affairs, to every feeling of virtue and honour, she bore, without remorse, a crown which she had acquired by a crime. "I admit," d'Alembert would say,† "that it is not for philosophy to vaunt herself too much of such pupils; but what would you have? One must love his friends with all their faults." One of these *faults* was only having murdered her husband.

Voltaire had at first, it must be allowed, shown profound indignation. "My dear brother," he wrote to Damilaville,‡ "I have your letter in which you consider the proceedings of the philosopher of the north not at all philosophical, and, at the same time, one of our brethren asks of me a copy of the *Philosophical Dictionary* for her. I certainly will not send a copy, at least until I have first added a chapter on such cruel actions."

But, gradually, lo! this indignation evaporates. Gradually? Why, no; never was conversion more rapid. It was in 1764, at the end of September, that he would have thought himself dishonoured by sending the empress a copy of his

\* It would be difficult to find any other cause for the esteem professed by the eighteenth century (see the *Lettres Persanes*, cxxix.) for another philosophic queen, Christina.

† Letter to Voltaire, October 1764.

‡ September 1764. These lines are suppressed in the Kehl edition, published by Beaumarchais.

book; and it was in the following year, in the beginning of March, that he sent his *Philosophy of History*—not a copy, mark well, but dedicated to her, and in slips! About the same time, learning that she had pensioned Diderot: “By my faith,” he wrote to that same Damilaville, “I embrace also the Empress of all the Russias! Who could have believed the Scythians were one day so nobly to recompense virtue, learning, philosophy, so unworthily treated among us?” It was held for certain that foreign sovereigns should publicly pension the men who were prosecuted in France as the enemies of religion and the laws. The Government did nothing, and did not even seem to view it as an affront. So much relaxation was there even in the springs of political self-interest, and of the simplest point of honour.

The new saint had, therefore, decidedly obtained a place in the antichristian calendar, and Voltaire had assumed the office of her priest. “It is as with preachers,” Bachaumont writes; \* “with him the saint of the day is always the greatest of saints.” See him, then, on his knees before the empress! He goes so far as to tell her, one fine day, that he regrets her having a name to be found in the common calendar. She was not made, he adds, to be named after one of those old saints; and he does not perceive that, in his fervour, he falls into a bloody epigram. Has he any farther perception of that which he proceeds to make in calling her the Semiramis of the north, when all the world knows that the Semiramis of antiquity killed her own husband, as Catherine did? Possibly so; but he has the air of one who makes the allusion in such perfect good faith, that we see her obliged gratefully to accept the homage of a writer of so distinguished a name. Accordingly she writes to him, shortly after the transmission of the book, a letter which he pronounces “charming;” and forth-

\* *Mémoires Secrets.*

with—"You see," he writes to his friend d'Argental, "how she behaves to the French, and you will feel certain that the late gentleman, her husband, will be thought to have been in the wrong by posterity."

Hardly converted to the worship of the empress, he can no longer comprehend how any one could think of being otherwise. Rousseau, for this alone,\* appears to him more criminal and more foolish than for all the faults of which he had previously accused him. Geneva, also, sinned against this female saint of the north; and Geneva was to have her share of his sarcasms. "Her Majesty condescended," he writes that same year, "to send for some Geneva women to teach the girls of St. Petersburg to read and sew. The council of Geneva has been tyrannical and foolish enough to debar free female citizens from going whither they pleased, and, in fine, so insolent as to order the departure from their city of a nobleman sent thither by that sovereign. This adventure has very sensibly affected me, for assuredly I would not weigh Catherine II. against the five-and-twenty bob-wigs of Geneva." These five-and-twenty wigs, nevertheless, were the only ones in Europe that would not, at that moment, bow before the crowned assassin; but in this he, ay, he, saw nothing but insolence and folly. "There are in that council," said he, "three or four rogues fit for nothing but being thrown into the lake." Then, as in expiation of their crime, he goes on; redoubling his protestations of fervent love, he adds: "I am with idolatry, Madam, rather than with profound respect, the priest of your temple."† Does she make war on the Turks—not a paltry village is taken by her troops but he sets himself to sing her praises as the goddess of battles. Dying, he says—he had been dying for seventy years—he leapt out of bed to receive

\* See *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, art. *Pierre le Grand*.

† December 1767.

a letter in which she announced to him a victory. He chanted a *Te Deum*, "or rather a *Te Deam*." "This was not," says he, "from a fever of the brain, but from a fever of the heart." But, brain or heart, the antichristian is always there. Know you wherefore he rejoices at Catherine's successes? Not, you may well believe, that Christ may re-enter Constantinople; but Catherine, victorious on the Bosphorus, will push on, he hopes, to Jerusalem, will recall the Jews, rebuild the ancient temple—and Christ will have lied.

Here, for the rest, lay the true cause, sometimes veiled, sometimes perfectly patent, of all his joys and all his disappointments. Even were we not saddened as Christians at such fierceness, could we fail to observe what a little, despicable, unphilosophic, and paltry mind it shows? But there will be many future occasions for saying the same thing of him, even where Christianity is not in question.

II.—He was wearying, then, to see those Jews, whom otherwise he detested, re-established in Jerusalem, that the ancient prophecies might appear ridiculous. But he did not even require so attractive a prospect to make him tolerate and encourage the horrors of war. It was enough that the sovereign who waged it was his friend.

We might extend this remark, were we inclined, not only to the greater number of the writers of the time, but to the sentiments they held on subjects connected with war, usurpations, conquests, the reign of brute force—war, in fine, in all its forms.

At first, indeed, they seem bursting with generous indignation against all who either shed human blood or cause it to be shed by others. Man's life, they say, is inviolable; nay, some go to the extreme consequence of the abolition of capital punishments. Every individual, every people is essentially free.



The right of conquest is a mere phrase ; conquest gives no more right than theft.

These principles Voltaire had a peculiar art of investing with those original forms by which ideas are settled down and fixed better than by reasonings. "We have been unable as yet to discover," he would say, for example,\* "what right Charlemagne had to the estates of his brother, or what right his brother and he, and Pepin their father, had to the estates of the race of Clovis, or what right Clovis had to the Gauls, a province of the Roman empire, or even what right the Roman empire had to those provinces." It is true, that in establishing so well, in that passage, the original liberty of nations, Voltaire had, as he always had, a certain object in view. It was not the Romans that he sought to attack ; it was Charlemagne, a man who could conquer for the sake of converting, and it was Clovis who could himself be converted. But not the less was the principle laid down as true, and in the whole school there was nothing but applause for verities of this sort.

But there is a wide distance between theory and practice, especially in a talking age, such as the eighteenth century might emphatically be called. Originating in a spirit of opposition rather than in any depth or sincerity of feeling, it was in vain that these grand novelties were founded for the most part in eternal truths ; they remained an affair of the intellect, that is to say, of mere words, for all is mere verbiage, liberty, faith, God even, when the heart is not there.

The love of humanity, accordingly, was rare, especially among those who made a loud profession of it. There ever lay concealed some selfish interest ; polemical passions and ill-temper had always a part in those counsels of toleration and of love, for it was not *men* that were loved, but sometimes these men and sometimes those, and always from hatred of

\* *Fragments sur l'Histoire.*

some others. Was there some crying injustice or shocking cruelty to expose, infinitely less sympathy was really felt with the victims than joy at the crushing of their oppressors. Still it is hatred, or at most anger, that comes out; it is not indignation. People cannot be indignant at will. Indignation, honest indignation, that of the true poet and of the eloquent orator, is an effervescence of true and generous feelings; it is the cry of honour blending with the cry of nature. No; the eighteenth century was not in a state to feel indignant. Accordingly, when no great clamour could be raised, nothing was said at all; some better opportunity for getting angry was waited for with the utmost calmness. Protestants could suffer and groan during three quarters of the reign of Louis XV. without one of those generous voices deigning to speak in their favour; on the contrary, they rather, as we shall ere long see, furnished arms against them. Calas expires, and behold them openly patronized, for then it was seen how very much might be made of the circumstances of his death. Even then the Protestant question must needs have its less serious side. "Since 1745," we find Voltaire saying,\* "we have hanged eight personages from among those who are called *preachers*, or *ministers of the Gospel*, guilty of no other crime than that of having prayed to God for the king in provincial French, and given a drop of wine and a bit of leavened bread to some weak-minded peasants." The Protestants must have been highly flattered, assuredly, with seeing themselves defended in this tone.

Such was not always the tone; but even although the same absence of serious feelings were not visible elsewhere under great vehemence of words, we should still have proofs enough of it. It is in Voltaire's correspondence that we see all the storms of the time commence and gather strength. How he

\* *Traité de la Tolérance.* 1763.

selects his subjects! How he discusses whether a noise should be made or not! How he gradually warms with his subject, so that this warmth should not communicate itself to others either too slowly or too rapidly! For that poor General Lally, whose rehabilitation was to redound so much to his honour, he had at first infinitely little pity. "You have been much concerned," he wrote to d'Alembert, some days after the execution,\* "about Lally's gag, and his thick neck, which the eldest son of that worthy gentleman, the executioner, made such a bungling work of, it being his first attempt." He adds, always in raillery, that Lally was a foolish fellow, a low wretch; all that could be admitted, according to him, was that he was not a traitor, and ought not to have died on the scaffold. D'Alembert was of the same opinion. "This Lally is a hateful fellow," he replies, "a bad man, who deserved death at the hands of everybody but the hangman. Be that as it may, let him repose in peace, and in peace let his respectable judges leave us." But ere long people changed their tone. Public opinion underwent a change. It had become the fashion to believe that Lally was innocent. Innocent or not—for Voltaire continued to trouble himself very little about the merits of the case—a clamour had to be raised about his tomb. That clamour was raised; and in such a manner that those who raised it at last deluded themselves and took up the matter seriously. Voltaire we find writing affectingly beautiful pages on the very death which he had so grossly ridiculed. Five days before his own death, on hearing of the General's rehabilitation, he sent his son these four lines—the last he ever traced on paper:† "The dying man revives on learning this great news. He most affectionately embraces M. de Lally. He sees that the king is the guardian of justice; he will die content." We willingly

\* June 1766.

† May 26, 1778.

allow ourselves to be moved by these words from Voltaire's dying bed—words evidently dictated by sincere feeling; but not the less had the matter begun, like so many others, with the loud profession of an indignation which was never felt.

III.—Thus it was not seriously, to return to the subject of war and conquests, that the right of the sword was denounced. There, too, there were only materials to feed opposition. A sovereign on friendly terms with the philosophers, could not, we have remarked, be in the wrong when he sought by war to round his territories.

No shame, besides, was felt in altering one's tone with regard to him. In the same chapter, on the same page, Alexander was a brigand, and Frederick a hero; at the utmost, the pen was sometimes drawn through what might have made the contrast too marked. "The verses that apply to the King of Prussia," wrote Voltaire to Thiriot,\* "and which are in manuscript in some copies of the *Henriade*, are no longer suitable. They were made for a philosophic and pacific king, not for a philosophic and conquering king. It would no longer become me to blame war in addressing a young monarch who wages it with so much glory." *It would no longer become me!* See the amount of his conviction, and of his attachment to principle. Accordingly, these, at need, he would call prejudices. His thanks to the king, who had sent him pills, are pretty well known :—

"Purged by the loved and royal hands  
Which, *braving prejudice*, proceed  
Austria and Hungary to bleed."

And what, in reality, was that war which was forgiven so promptly? Frederick himself wrote the history of it, and, in a first manuscript, condemned it with the utmost severity.

\* June 1741.

After having spoken of his doubtful claims to Silesia, "Let one add to these considerations," he goes on to say, "troops always ready, a well-replenished treasury, and the vivacity of my character; these were the reasons I had for making war on Maria Theresa." He hesitated, however, he further says in that history; but "ambition, interest, the desire to be spoken of, prevailed, and it was resolved that there should be war."

This avowal, which was not wanting in nobleness, he expunged, but by the advice of Voltaire. Ere this it had been Voltaire that stopped, on hearing of his accession to the throne, the printing of his *Anti-Machiavel*, to spare him the annoyance that the king might receive from the lucubrations of the young prince. Philosophers are like confessors. From the time of their ceasing to possess—and it is what they rarely possess—influence enough to make kings submit to the rules of justice, the only use they are of is to legalize departures from those rules.

Thus, throughout the whole correspondence of Voltaire with Frederick during this first war, not one serious word do we find directed against that warlike ardour which suddenly followed so many pacific phrases, or against that Machiavelism which exploded at the very moment when the *Anti-Machiavel* was in the press; for, by a new Machiavelism, Frederick persisted in having it printed. In the letters of the king you will find some returns, very dry and very brief it is true, yet some returns of right feeling on the horrors of war; in the letters of the philosopher, none. If he speaks of them, it is in jest. On recovering from one of his innumerable illnesses, he writes: \* "I placed one foot only on the bank of the Styx, but I was grieved, Sire, at the number of poor wretches I saw passing. Some came from Scharding, others from Prague or Iglau. Will not you and your brother kings, then, cease

\* April 1742.

from ravaging that earth, which you say you are so desirous to see happy?" Here we have what might almost seem a lecture; but he hastens to pass on to some stale jests on the Abbé St. Pierre, and on his dreams. Elsewhere, if led to be a little grave on those disasters, he does what is invariably done by those who pay court to warlike kings—he supposes that Frederick groans over them.

"I love you," we find him say,

—"despite those scenes so dread,  
Despite those warriors number'd with the dead;  
Your reason ruthless deeds may vainly curse,  
While headlong valour stifles all remorse."

Great comfort this, assuredly, for those whom he sent to the banks of the Styx to meditate on this fine union of a sensitive heart and a pitiless ardour! But the idea pleased the king; he came almost to believe himself sincerely afflicted at the calamities he had ordered, and sincerely indignant at those kings who, like himself, ordered them.

Nothing is more curious, on this head, than certain odes which he rhymed when these calamities did not fall in with his views, or if he found he had to do with a stronger or a more astute person than himself.

"Dominion's ardour, or revenge's thirst,  
With deadly poison has infected kings.  
The law, their power: of all their rights the first,  
The force that earth into their clutches brings.....  
Mankind's oppressors, monarchs steep'd in blood,  
And hateful sovereigns of prostrate slaves.....  
With lying lips, hear flattery compare  
You to the gods our destinies that rule,  
Ev'n you who vomited from hell appear.....  
The features of the gods you charge with wrong  
Have lost their stamp in your malicious hearts.....  
What age e'er saw men's morals more depraved?  
Or monarchs than our present worse behaved?  
To their own subjects fierce, as to their foes".....

Thus had Frederick sung, or nearly so, in an ode of 1749, which has not been preserved. At that time, his words were so amusingly at variance with his acts, that Voltaire could not refrain from smiling. "I would willingly believe," he wrote to him, "that the 'Ode on War' is from the pen of some poor citizen, a good poet in other respects, tired of paying taxes, and seeing his land ravaged for the quarrels of sovereigns. Not at all. It is from the king who began the squabble—it is from him who has gained a province and five battles. Sire, your Majesty makes fine verses, but you make a jest of the world." Again the commencement of a lecture; but stay. "Nevertheless," continues Voltaire, "who knows but that you may really think all this when you write it? It may very possibly be the case, that humanity may speak to you in the same cabinet in which politics and glory have signed orders for the assembling of armies." And once more Frederick thought the explanation excellent. "Don't be surprised at my 'Ode on War,'" he replied; "these, I assure you, are my sentiments. Distinguish between the statesman and the philosopher, and know that reason may lead a man to war, duty make him a politician, while by inclination he is a philosopher." Thus, once more, why should those complain whom he crushed? His philosophy is always at hand, like the beads in the pouch of the Italian or Spanish brigand.

IV.—But Voltaire is not content with having excused war; he would fain end, it would seem, by becoming himself a man-slayer, for the encouragement of those who were so by profession.

In 1757, he invented a new machine, a kind of chariot, armed with scythes, "by means of which," he wrote to the Marshal de Richelieu, "with six hundred men and six hundred horses, one might destroy on a plain an army of ten

thousand men." "I very well know," he adds, "that it is not for me to occupy myself about the fittest mode of killing my fellows. I confess I make myself ridiculous; but, after all, if a monk, with charcoal, sulphur, and saltpetre, changed the art of war throughout this whole villanous world, why should not a blotter of paper, like me, render some little service *incognito*?" He never can say enough about this "new cookery," or this "little amusing toy," from which one clearly enough perceives, in spite of this tone of levity, that he was looking about for some little glory. Richelieu laughed at him. He then spoke of it to the King of Prussia, and the King of Prussia laughed at him. But let it not be imagined that he gave up the idea. In 1770, we find him resolutely bent on Catherine's making a trial of it against the Turks. She objects that it would be absolutely necessary to have to combat enemies in close order, on a perfectly level plain, &c. He insists: "We are enjoying the finest possible weather—the finest season for fighting the Turks. Will these barbarians always attack as hussars? Will they never present themselves in close array, so as to be run through by some of my Babylonian cars? I should wish, at least, to have contributed to your killing some Turks; people say that, for a Christian, it is a work agreeable to God. This does not accord with my maxims of toleration; but men are made up of contradictions, and, besides, your Majesty turns my head."

The man who best exposed these contradictions, when he did not fall into them himself, was again the King of Prussia. In 1773, when Voltaire urges him to join the Austrians, in order to expel the Turks from Constantinople, he replies by quizzing him in a manner not wanting in tartness. "Who, then, would have been daring enough to incur the greater excommunication of the patriarch of Ferney and the whole sect of the Encyclopædists? Who would like to gain the fine



title of chief of brigands, or of brigand himself? These gentlemen are about to govern Europe, as the popes subjected it in former days. They must needs have missionaries to multiply conversions. Nobody will remain to fight. I am sorry my age prevents me from enjoying so fine a sight. My cotemporaries will be pitied for having been born in an age of darkness, at the close of which the dawn of reason brought to perfection has appeared."

In 1774, Voltaire wrote his *Tactique*, with many tirades against war and warriors. On this occasion, Frederick gets a little angry. "I tell you," he says, "I would rather declaim against the quartan fever than against war. It is lost time. Governments allow cynics to bawl, and pursue their own course."

Shortly after this, the king is neither angry nor in jest; he is content with putting a question. "While you are decrying the art of war, which you call infernal, a whole score of your letters encourages me to take part in the affairs of the East. Reconcile, if you can, these contradictions, and have the goodness to send me their agreement."

Their agreement, alas! lies in this: that throughout, there was neither real conviction nor true humanity; that the philosophy of the day spoke to all parties in their own tongue—to nations, using that of humanity; to kings, that of ambition. The whole sect of the Encyclopædists—to use the words of Frederick—had fallen, and was falling every day, into the same contradiction—bellowing against war in France, and seeing nothing finer in Prussia.

V.—Voltaire, consequently, was in reality very moderately affected with the horrors of war, so long as they did not approach his own château. For him they were, on certain occasions, a theme for verse, and sometimes very fine verse;

but in the whole of his private prose, we find him speaking of those horrors with levity, and worse than levity. "I must tell you that I have been crying *Vive le Roi!* on learning that the French have killed 4000 English with the bayonet. This was not humane, but it was very necessary."\* *Necessary!* Another of those words which depict the man and the epoch. Fatalism, the summary of all infidel philosophy, lay at the root of all this; and fatalism is essentially devoid of feeling. About the same time: "People talk still of two or three small massacres," writes Voltaire to his friend Argental; next, "What, then, are we to do? Why, present *Tancred* in December, print it in January, and laugh." And this was in the middle of the Seven Years' War! In fine, as for this king to whom he offers incense: "If he be always fortunate and full of glory, I shall be justified in my old liking for him; if he be beaten, I shall be revenged." And to this, for his part, is the morality of those grand dramas reduced. The beaten are, of necessity, in the wrong.

Ask not, then, of him to pity a people which shall have suffered itself to fight and be conquered, even after heroic efforts to preserve its freedom.

He has no pity, for example, for those whom the Romans subjugated. What though he once or twice laughs, as we have seen, at the old and inexorable opinion according to which people thought themselves, at Rome, born to hold dominion over the world; he admits it in fact, and not he only, but Montesquieu, Rousseau, and, in short, the whole of that school. "The only talent worthy of Rome," exclaimed Fabricius, "is that of conquering the world;" and the Encyclopædical phrase which he adds,† shows clearly enough the sympathies of the man who had put it into his mouth. Mon-

\* Letter to Madame du Deffand, October 1760.

† "— and to establish there the reign of virtue."

tesquieu, with his ruthless reasonings on the rights of conservation, extended to the fore-arming against all future danger, legalizes in the past, and seems to sanction for the future, the condemnation of any nation that dares to give umbrage to a people or a king more powerful than themselves.\* Voltaire, whom we have already seen applauding, but on special grounds, the crushing of the Jews, seems hardly more affected by that of other nations; nay, he often seems to make no account whatever of nationality.

Thus, in his *Age of Louis XIV.*, "The great statesman," he says, "is he who leaves behind great monuments of usefulness to his country. The monument that immortalizes Cardinal Mazarin, is the acquisition of Alsace. It was he who bestowed that province on France." Mark his words—*he bestowed*. It was his, apparently. The historian does not even observe that it was not French in manners, in religion, or in language, and that it could not desire to become French. No. It was so much gain, absolutely as if the thing in question were an uninhabited tract, acquired by Mazarin from the sea or from a river. And when Louis XIV., in 1681, was by the taking of Strasbourg to complete the iniquitous work of his minister, like that minister, we find him regarded only as immortalizing himself by a monument "useful to the country." The bombardment of Genoa, the devastation of Holland, and the conflagration of the Palatinate, appear, in that same book, only as imperceptible stains on a surface all radiant with eulogies.

VL.—With so much tenderness for past iniquities, he must needs have some for those of his own day; and here we find

\* "Between societies, the right of natural defence sometimes implies the necessity of attacking, when one people sees another people adjoining it prosperous, and when a longer peace would put that neighbouring people in a condition to destroy it."—(Book x. ch. xi.)

him even running ahead of the powerful in their projects of oppression.

Not content with doing his utmost to demoralize that ancient city in whose neighbourhood he had fixed his residence, he laboured further to deprive it of its liberty.

And yet, in 1765, in his *Republican Ideas*, he had bestowed the highest eulogiums on Geneva's manners, laws, and government. He had held it forth as the type of a free and a wise state, as a blessed oasis amid the miseries and the follies of Europe. Here, indeed, there was exaggeration after the manner of Jean Jacques; for Geneva, a free state, did not escape the agitations incident to liberty—but his error seemed that of an admirer and a friend.

Well, then, in 1766, at the close of some troubles that were appeased by the mediation of France, it is he who writes thus to the Duke de Choiseul:—" Might I venture, I would beseech you to appoint M. de Beauteville to remain, in virtue of the guarantee, armed with authority to determine all the contestations that will ever be arising in Geneva. You will be entitled to send one day, in a friendly manner, a strong garrison for the maintenance of peace, and to make Geneva, in a friendly manner, a good arsenal when you come to have war in Italy. Geneva will depend on you, in a friendly manner; but"—he pauses. It is for the minister to put obstacles out of the way. Enough for him to have suggested this generous idea.

A few years after this, it was Poland that drew upon itself his kindly regards. People know how it perished; people don't know, or they don't wish to know, that the first who advised its destruction was Voltaire.

In 1770 he expresses his astonishment at the King of Prussia's not interfering in the agitations of that country. The king replies, that he is getting old, and has grown wise.

Voltaire insists. Why should he lose so fine an opportunity? He will be content, however, he says, "if in this disturbance the king shall round his kingdom of Prussia." And for justice? and philosophy? "In philosophy," he replies, "the round figure is the most perfect figure."

The king accordingly proceeds to round his states, and the business is speedily settled. "People will have it," Voltaire writes to him, "that it was you who projected the partition of Poland. I believe it, for there is genius in the project." The king, in fact, was not a little proud of it. "Mark," he replies, "that this has been done without bloodshed, and that the Encyclopædists will not be able to declaim against the *mercenary brigands*, as they call our soldiers." And Voltaire proceeds to make merry with the Poles for having by their quarrels made the thing so easy to be done:—

"To the Palatines, Peace may with reason declare:  
See, the devil has caught you all snug in his snare,  
To the neighbouring potentates too long you've been  
Such subservient dupes as were ne'er before seen.  
And now to small purpose a clamour you make,  
When those neighbours among them distribute the cake."

Such is the only *De Profundis* which, according to him, had to be chanted at the grave of Poland. The king joins in the stave, and, in a poem of six cantos,\* bitterly ridicules the wretches whom he had robbed of their country.

VII.—But what ideas of mother-country had the men of the eighteenth century? Our country does not mean the soil, but the collective traditions that belong to it, and such traditions they made it their trade to scout and scatter to the winds. They, therefore, had no country; they could not have any.

Must we except Rousseau? People say so, and even be-

\* *Les Confédérés.*

lieve what they say; but it would not be easy, we think, to maintain it in the face of the proofs to the contrary.

It is one thing to praise and another to love; and the Geneva which he praised had, moreover, not much resemblance to the Geneva which he had known. It was a country of his own invention, a *beau-idéal*, imagined, possibly in good faith, for the requirements of his ardent polemics, and which he himself disavowed from the moment that the true Geneva refused to admit the likeness. Thenceforth he calumniated with no less ardour than he had shown in vaunting her; he obstinately, at the risk of calling down upon her the domination of foreigners, fanned the flame of the quarrels of which his condemnation was the subject or the pretext. That country, to which he had paid such magnificent compliments,\* he utterly subverts in 1764, by his *Letters from the Mountain*, in which he almost openly invites the citizens, that is to say, a certain minority of the citizens, to take arms against the Government, and that because his *Emilie* had been consigned to the flames, as had before been done at Paris. He confounds at pleasure the fact and the right. Sometimes it is his work which did not deserve the flames; and to prove that he has not attacked Christianity, he attacks it more and more explicitly; sometimes it is the rights of all that have been violated in his person, and, all the while protesting that he has no wish to be revenged, he prepares and makes sure of that vengeance. No! he had no love for his country. He had loved it as a system, and for the support of a system; the system failing, he could only hate it.

\* See the preface to the *Discours sur l'Inégalité*—(Discourse on Inequality).

## CHAPTER VII.

I.—Love of country again—Variable appreciations—Selfishness and cosmopolitanism.

II.—French pens and Prussian canons—How far France was from being a country (*patrie*)—Debasement of the country in the person of the king—Factitious revivals of the old monarchical faith—The *Siege of Calais*—What royalty lost on these returns of affection—How the King of Prussia dethroned the King of France—Potsdam and Versailles—Why no indignation was felt at this anti-French enthusiasm.

III.—Interested compensations—Worship of Henry IV.—History of his reputation—*Eclat* under Louis XIII.—Forgotten under Louis XIV.—Resurrection under Louis XV., but without regard to historical truth—The *Henriade*—How the author and the public gradually enlarged its bearing—How many questions were affected by it—Dedication to the Queen of England—What Henry IV. becomes—Alms on the Pont-Neuf—Was it calumny to hold him to have been an infidel?—Voltaire rebuts the charge of having sung in praise of a believer.

IV.—What is wanting in the *Henriade*—The Epic a work of enthusiasm or of faith—What made Virgil a true poet in an anti-poetical age—The *Henriade* has nothing new in it but what is not epic—The marvellous in it is cold and flat—What is implied in poetical faith, and how necessary it is—The *Discordade*—Danger of personifying abstractions—Their place in the ancient mythology—Voltaire seems to have been afraid to produce any illusion.

It is difficult, no doubt, to fix a precise point at which the love of innovation becomes incompatible with the love of country. Common notions cannot fail, on this question, to mislead us. Sometimes the state assumes an attitude of immobility, and, on the least appearance of eagerness about the future, on the least expression of a wish in the sense of progress, a man is held to be no better than a bad citizen; sometimes, again, people seem to think it impossible to run too fast, and that man is accounted the best who shall have caused the largest amount of demolition. To whom are we to listen? Not to the enthusiastic admirers of the past, still less

to those of the future. The former want to preserve the house, however bad it be ; the latter would cast it down, even though good, and without knowing how to build another.

But as nothing goes more to constitute the diversity of nations than diversity of traditions, the destruction of individual traits tends to render the former more and more alike. Every enemy of the past may conceive himself warranted to perceive in the future a moment at which the nations will all be merged in one, and henceforth he ceases morally to belong to the people among whom he first drew breath.

Here again, consequently, there is a limit difficult to be determined. No man will regret that nations no longer glory in holding themselves apart, and hating one another ; but there is a wide difference between this and the universal fusion which has been fondly imagined, by some, from philanthropy, by others, unhappily—and those by far the greater number at the present day—in order to act the despot at their ease and with a wider sweep.

The levellers of the eighteenth century did not carry their views so far. They thought little of asking themselves, in theory, in what their labours were to terminate. They tilled the ground for tilling's sake, leaving others to come and sow it. They did not rise to the contemplation of that idea of a fusion of the nations, a vast intellectual and political brotherhood. They were neither Christians enough in their morals to desire it as an object of Christian humanity, nor were they so versed in political speculation as to embrace so immense a transformation within their range of view. Their cosmopolitanism, in short, went no farther than vaunting, like Montesquieu, the English constitution, and rejoicing, with Voltaire, in the triumphs of the King of Prussia, in whose person they embodied, for good and evil, Reason advancing to the conquest of the world.



II.—It is long since this strange alliance between the pens of Frenchmen and the canons of the Prussians has been fully discussed. But if we would be just, let us not forget to remark also, how little France was in a condition to be fondly regarded as their country by any who did not see their country in the shadow of a church-steeple. It was not, although much has been said to that effect, that political life was at zero there. The absence of it was little felt, and there was, besides, in the municipal and parliamentary dignities, which were open to all, a career always open for many ambitious spirits. Still, as embodied in the king, their country had sunk with him very low in the minds and hearts of the French. Louis XIV. had said, "The state, it is I." There was no need for Louis XV.'s saying so; the fact was not the less positive. Great as their country had been during the reign of his predecessor, the French felt that with him it had fallen into contempt; and as none could now speak of the love of their country unless in connexion with the love of their sovereign—a sentiment almost impossible—every attempted re-awakening of any such feeling had something false and forced in it. What commotion, for example, in 1765, about the *Siege of Calais*, by Dubelloy! France, one would say, was terrified at finding herself so little monarchical; she had seized with eagerness the occasion of being strongly so for once, as an infidel would do, who should become devout for a single Lent. The play, it is true, is not much worth. This was known and whispered; but woe to him who shall say so aloud! He would be called a bad citizen and a bad Frenchman; and it were in vain for him to say, like the Duke de Gevres, "Would that the verses were as French as I am!" it were no better than heresy and treason not to applaud the tiresome declamations of Dubelloy. The *Siege of Calais*, you will find, was acted over and over

again at the court ; in Paris, in all the cities and towns of the provinces, in the garrisons, the colleges, and even in the few colonies left by the Seven Years' War to the French. You will find every rhyming poetaster celebrate this return on the part of France to the worship of the monarchy, and M. Basset de la Marelle, advocate-general to the Parliament of Dijon, pretend to prove that there was no patriotism beyond France, and that the English themselves knew not what it meant.

Royalty could not fail to lose by these clumsy exaggerations. In making so much noise about the reconciliation between the crown and the people, both the breach itself and all that was factitious in the healing of it, were made evident. It was owing, then, only to a bad play that France had recollected her ancient devotion to her sovereigns ! Did not the King of Prussia's admirers feel all the more at their ease in celebrating a man who stood on his own merits, and had no need, in order to be a king, of exhibiting himself in these clouds of incense ? One day—it was during the Seven Years' War—a report prevailed that he had been captured, and was about to be brought into France. "So much the better," said the Duchess of Orleans, "I shall be happy to see a king."

The singularity of his manners contributed almost as much as his glory to captivate a giddy people, sated equally with the pomps of monarchy and with social refinements. In this point of view, we shall find more than one common feature in him and Rousseau. Rousseau was a Diogenes among the Encyclopædists ; Frederick, among the crowned heads. The one opposed the picture of savage life to the delicate habits of the day, and his own savage manners to the worldliness of the men of letters ; the other opposed to the sumptuous lives of kings the simplicity which he inherited from his father,

who, with four millions sterling in his coffers, never had a new coat made for him without having the buttons of the old one transferred to the new. "The king," we are told by Voltaire in his recollections of Potsdam, "rose at five o'clock A.M. in summer, and at six in winter. If you would know the royal ceremonies of his rising, what were the great and the small introductions, his grand-almoner's functions, his grand-chaplain's, his first gentleman of the chamber's, I have to answer, that a footman came to light his fire, dress and shave him, and yet for the most part he dressed himself. His chamber was handsome enough. A rich silver balustrade, ornamented with little cupids very well carved, seemed to shut in the raised part of the room, on which you saw the curtains of a bed ; but behind the curtains, instead of a bed, there was a library. The king used a truckle-bed, concealed by a screen." Such were the stories current amid the magnificences of Versailles, and the man acquired greatness from all the attendance he did not possess.

But without affecting to approve of that narrow-minded patriotism which acknowledges no greatness and no genius anywhere but among its own countrymen, it cannot be denied that Voltaire and his whole school scandalously exceeded the demands of justice in favour of Frederick, then at war with their country. We would ask how the public testimonies of their joy at his successes, and their disappointment at his reverses, were not received with a storm of indignation in France? How was it that that brave *noblesse*, who went to be butchered in Germany, while the *Encyclopédie*, in silk stockings, strutted about in the drawing-rooms of Paris, did not, according to an ancient practice of which Voltaire had one day known something, order their footmen to give a sound drubbing to coxcombs who made vows for the conqueror of Silesia and the victor of Rosbach? Alas! it was

because the nobility themselves were seduced. It was thought fashionable to think it well that France should learn, at their expense, how to improve a little in the art of war. If Frederick twice betrayed France, he was not the less a good soldier, and, what is more, a philosopher. People knew that Voltaire, the dictator, was at his feet; and there were none but the Jesuits, very far from being French themselves when their interests required it, who accused Voltaire of not being French.

III.—It is true that Voltaire contrived also at times to be very French, and even more than those could have wished who accused him of not being so.

In refuting reproaches of this kind, the worship paid to Henry IV. was of marvellous use to him and his party. Could it be said that those were not Frenchmen who adored the memory of a king so eminently French, and so beloved by the French? Were those not royalists who sang of him—

“He reigned at once by right of conquest, and by right of birth”?

In fine, might not all such reproaches have been hurled back upon that clergy which had anathematized Henry IV., those Jesuits who had armed assassins against him, and that Romanist *noblesse* which had marched under the standard of the Guises?

There was but this objection to make: that the Henry IV. of Voltaire and his friends, was not the Henry IV. of history.

That prince's reputation is, at the present day, somewhat on the decline. Impartial researches have reduced to their true value the testimonies of attachment which burst forth at his death.\* Without expunging his name from the list of

\* See, among other works, the *Histoire des Français* of M. de Sismondi, at the commencement of the twenty-second volume. The author of the *Essai sur Paris, Saint-*

good kings, it has been found necessary to admit that he showed himself on the throne neither so devoted, nor so great, nor yet so wise a king as it was the fashion to think. Sully has lost less, but is also in the way to lose.

It was chiefly during the minority of Louis XIII. that people learned to regret Henry IV. An infant king, a feeble female regent, incapable and greedy counsellors, endless disorders, everything, in short, contributed to put in strong relief all that had been good in Henry and about Henry. He himself had said—"It is when I am gone that people will see what I am worth."

On order being once more re-established, he was less thought of, and, under Louis XIV., was almost forgotten. Perhaps he was less forgotten than it seems; perhaps people began to contrast with the miseries of the time the remembrance, already idealized, of the years of the Bearnese prince. But, anyhow, this was much in secret, and, besides, there were many reasons for his not being spoken of. There was an evident impropriety in recalling to Louis XIV. that his grandfather had nearly missed ascending the throne, and that the divine right, as Henry IV. further would say, had much need of help from the *canon* law. It did not do to be saying too much to him, the revocator of the Edict of Nantes, that his grandsire had been born a Huguenot, had gained as a Huguenot all his laurels, and had owed his crown to the Huguenots. Bossuet, their great adversary, was the only man who could speak of Henry IV. without compromising himself with Louis XIV.; and even he spoke of him to Louis only in a strictly private letter, not published till long after.

Such, then, at the commencement of the eighteenth century, who died in 1776, had made a large collection of materials, by means of which he thought himself sure of demolishing the reputation of Henry IV. Death prevented his making use of them, and they were lost. See also Chateaubriand's *Analyse raisonnée de l'Histoire de France*.

tury, was the reputation of Henry IV. Then it was that we see it suddenly burst forth, yet in a manner more and more wide of historical truth. One may liken it to a stream which has been long pent up, and which, on escaping from its confinement, takes quite a different direction from what it would have taken if free.

It is not unlikely that the whole advantage about to be taken of that name was not immediately perceived. Voltaire himself, at the time of his writing the *Henriade*, did not make of his hero what he afterwards made of him, and the *Henriade* had not, at its first appearance, all that scope and bearing which the age was ere long to give to it. The public of France had not yet become accustomed to seek for and to see opposition everywhere; its author was still somewhat a man of the other century. His grand object was to write fine verses; and he did that.

But these fine verses had been sketched in the Bastile. There they had acquired that tint—that smoky tinge, if I may venture on the expression—which was beginning to be so highly appreciated, and which would probably have been thought to characterize them, even had they not had it, from the single fact of their having been hatched within the bars of a prison.

How many questions, besides, were there that no one durst discuss, as yet, in prose, and that were found there—thanks to the poetical license—either resolved, or, which at once implied a great deal, indicated and stated! Indeed, in merely commenting on the *Henriade*, one might with little noise make one's-self a whole *encyclopédie*. The rights of sovereigns, those of subjects, the sovereignty of the people, toleration, the struggle with the clergy, the struggle with Christianity, one and all of these were there. It was, as it were, the *programme* of the age, and this the author intimated from

the first by dedicating his poem to the Queen of England. "Your Majesty will find in it impartial truths. Morality without superstition, a liberalism equally opposed to revolt and to tyranny, the rights of kings ever acknowledged, those of nations never abandoned." He had, therefore, he said, been only impartial, but that of itself was an immense step.

Accordingly, just as Voltaire advanced in his career, and as his opinions became more and more clearly defined, the *Henriade*, viewed as a prophecy illustrated by facts, assumed a more and more distinct and aggressive signification. That same Henry who had appeared at first, like Virgil's *Æneas*, fit only to seem a good soldier on the battle-field, and a good man on other occasions, you see gradually become a free-thinker and an infidel. That line,

"I judge not 'twixt Geneva and old Rome,"

might have originally expressed no more than the uncertainty of a warrior little versed in theological distinctions; but what is certain is, that it ere long began to mean, that truth is no more to be found at Rome than at Geneva, no more at Geneva than at Rome. In 1766, in a short piece on the death of the Dauphin, Voltaire represents Henry IV.

"— at Geneva and at Rome  
Alike, in his own heart, disposed to laugh ;"

and *Saint Henry*, like *Saint Catherine*, was one of the watch-words of the Encyclopædical army.

A friend of Voltaire's was accosted one day on the Pont-Neuf by a poor man asking alms. "In God's name!" said the beggar. The other took no notice. "In the name of the Holy Virgin!" "In the name of the Saints!" Still no response. The two had now reached the statue of Henry IV. "In the name of Henry IV.!" said the man. The other stopped, and gave him a crown.

It is possible, however, that, in making this prince an infidel, Voltaire and his friends may have said too much. His famous saying, "Paris is well worth a mass," hardly makes him a Roman Catholic; his conversion, at the precise moment he thought it necessary, was hardly more compatible with attachment as a Protestant to his faith. Be this as it may, what may be most clearly gathered from the eulogies bestowed on him by the eighteenth century is, that he received them as much at least on account of his scepticism, real or not, as for all his virtues put together. Voltaire admits this in many places. He thinks it of importance to prove satisfactorily that he had not sounded the praises of a believer; he lets it clearly be seen that he would little have cared to erect a temple to a man whom he must, of necessity, have made a Christian. Proud as he was of having composed the *Henriade*, he felt, in his declining years, as if he needed to excuse his having done so at the bar of the age, by showing that, if reserved in appearance, not the less decided was he in substance.

IV.—But this was to confess, at the same time, all the faults of his poem. The epic is essentially a work of enthusiasm, or of faith if you will, for one of the two may suffice. Virgil, assuredly, believed as little in the pagan divinities as Voltaire did the doctrines of Christianity; but he was filled, at least, with love for his subject, with the enthusiasm of ancient times, and had an exquisite relish for that antique nature in which all his pictures were set. He well knew that he could not restore the time-worn fabric of paganism, but he left to others the task of demolishing it, and he piously collected for an unknown edifice, all those everlastingly good and solid materials—love of rural scenes, reverence for ancestors, and time-honoured traditions of patriotism and of glory,



in which his pictures are encased. It was thus that he contrived to carry even into the midst of a corrupt and unbelieving age the emotions of primitive poetry, and thus it is that he still forces us to weep. But as for Voltaire, who ever shed a tear on reading his *Henriade*? Who has ever fondly read it a second time? Who even has ever read it with any gratification but that found in meeting with fine verses, and, after all, it is but a meagre gratification when the verses are only fine. Nevertheless, it is not that it is wanting in affecting pictures; but they are mere pictures, or, we should rather say, groups of statues. All is there but life; and what is worse, you feel that you cannot look for life there, seeing it is not Pygmalion's marble, warming into life under a look of love, but it is flesh turned into marble while exposed to a wind of scepticism and death.

We set aside, as bearing less on our subject, and as to be found everywhere, the specially literary criticisms to which the *Henriade* has given rise. It were easy, moreover, to show that they may all be referred to that which we have just indicated. There is nothing new in the *Henriade* except what is not epic, allusions, expressions of opinion, scepticism. Take these away, and you have Virgil and Lucan; Virgil without his elegant simplicity, Lucan without his turgidity, but also without his fervid patriotism, his energy, and his raciness. From the one or the other of these, everything, pictures, narratives, scenes of carnage or of love, have, with very few exceptions, been taken. Voltaire did not possess the secret of that originality which other authors have given to such borrowings. Nay, he never sought for it; he did not feel the want of it. Philosophical novelty was enough for him; poetical novelty would rather have frightened him. He cared little about the ancient form of the vase, provided the liquor, whether poison or perfume, was new and well

received. All else, as M. Villemain has said, is no more for M. Voltaire than a sort of epic ceremonial, which wearies him, and which he makes as short as possible.

Hence, further, the coldness to be observed in whatever of the marvellous he has thought himself obliged to intersperse in his poem.

We should never think of insisting that the poet must seriously believe in his fictions, and actually prostrate himself before the gods of his own creation; but we look for his having some little affection for the productions of his imagination. Where religious faith is impossible, we would at least have that certain something which may be called poetical faith. As for the former, Voltaire had it not; and the latter was impossible with a marvellous of this kind. It has been said that the *Henriade* might be called the *Discordiadé*. This is not far from the truth, for there are many passages in which Discord is the leading personage in the poem. But what is discord? Why, it is an abstraction. The pagans had personified it; but those pagans personified everything, even fever. It was a complete system, and the poesy of the whole was reflected on such of the details as, left isolated, would not have had enough of it. The ancient poets, moreover, took care, in personifying these abstractions, not to give them the most prominent parts; they made them only third or fourth-rate deities; as Juvenal says, lost among the common herd of the gods. But Discord is the Jupiter of the *Henriade*, and, what is worse, a Jupiter perpetually confronted, not with some other forged deity, but with God—the one true God. Thus we find ourselves perpetually bandied from the true to the false—from matters of faith to the inventions of a profane rhetoric. All illusion becomes impossible. One might even say that the poet was afraid of giving us some little of it, for he takes care to forewarn us in his

prologue that he is about to mingle the false and the true,\* and this singular notice reoccurs indirectly several times in the course of the poem. What, besides, is still more clear, is, that the matters of faith and the fictions are, in the author's view, almost on a par. Now, this is not a vice which must strike religious persons only. Were you as infidel as Voltaire, you would feel the want, in an epic poem, of something more than negations; you could not truly admire, you could feel no fondness for any epic not composed with warmth of feeling.

\* "Descend from heaven, O Truth august! . . .  
Speak; and if Fable could, in olden time,  
Her soft notes mingle with thy voice sublime—  
If her light hand thy lofty head could dress,  
And with her shade set off thy loveliness,  
O let her now with me thy steps pursue."

## CHAPTER VIII.

- I.—Voltaire defends himself for having pleaded for the Reformation—Why the philosophers sympathize so little with Protestants—Germany—England—Holland—Geneva—Abauzit—Bonnet—Tissot—Tronchin—Haller—Herder—Court de Gebelin—Necker—Rabaut Saint-Etienne—Guénée—Lambert—Euler—Frederick isolated in his own kingdom—Locke—Infidelity brought forth in England under the French and Roman Catholic influence—Why she has never reigned paramount there.—II.—Voltaire and his followers astonished at finding the Protestants remaining Christians—Spite and acts of injustice—Charges of fanaticism—The Camisards—Jurieu and Bayle—Woe to whosoever has sinned against philosophy!—III.—Voltaire and Calvin—Servetus: why his death caused so much indignation—Calvin consigned to hell by the verdict of Voltaire.
- IV.—Voltaire's historical appreciations—He liked to skim over the truth and to dive into what was false—In what sense his intellect was vast—His apparent rectitude—Qualities of his style—Hidden vices—Mobility—Ever cleverness rather than good sense.—V.—He is fond of lowering both things and men—Childish appreciation of the causes of the Reformation—He does not see, or does not choose to see, that it was one of the phases of the emancipation of thought—No more does he admit that it was preceded by religious wants and feelings—Trickery and cupidity did all.
- VI.—System of little causes—What these are in the eyes of the believer, and what in the eye of the infidel—Fontenelle and his *Dialogues of the Dead*—Voltaire resumes and pursues the same theme—*Zadig*—*Candide*—*Essay on the manners and the mind of nations*—The exaggerations of Bossuet in the *Discourse on Universal History*—Voltaire's exaggerations and falsifications in an opposite direction.

THE more complacency Voltaire felt at the thought of having made the *Henriade* an antichristian manifesto, the more did he defend himself against having made it an anti-catholic work—a pleading in favour of the Reformation.

It was incontestable, notwithstanding, that the Reformation had the best part there, since all the good parts were given to Protestants. Historically, this was justice; but there

were too many in France to whom this justice was displeasing, for the author not to think himself obliged to soften the too unfavourable impression it might make.

It is not here, nevertheless, that the true reason for the more than severe judgments which he has been the means of diffusing on the Reformation and its chief leaders, must be sought for.

One is astonished, at first, to find that the greater number of the freethinkers of that time sympathized so little with the partisans of free inquiry in religion. If, as has so often been said, Voltairian infidelity is a daughter of the Reformation, why so little intimacy between the daughter and the mother?

It is because the (alleged) mother had preserved, notwithstanding the general enervation, force enough and faith enough to repudiate the daughter; it is because, to speak without a figure, those who protested against Rome, were those also who protested most courageously against the inroads of infidelity.

Look at Protestant Germany. When Frederick wanted to surround himself with infidels, he had to send for them to France. Neither their influence nor his could create a party of German Voltairians.

Look at England. It was she, it was at least some of her children, who gave the signal for the antichristian struggle. But Voltaire would in vain give her the credit of all the destructive successes which he obtained on the Continent: he did not succeed in shaking any of her institutions, and it was from England that all the serious attacks against his scepticism and himself proceeded. She had some great infidels, but they were isolated, and to this day she remains, in the mass, profoundly believing. Just as he had erred at first in assuming that all whom he heard speaking freely on politics

were revolutionists, so he erred again in seeing infidels in all who freely examined matters in religion. It was an error that suited him too well, for him not to persist in it; but facts not the less clearly convicted him.

Look at Holland. Bayle lived there; there all the bad books that inundated Europe were printed. Was the faith of Holland shaken? No; she seems hardly to have been aware of the movement. Setting aside those few publishers—and even they did not all belong to the country—she will be found hardly to have had any place in the history of the struggles of that time. “We print your works, but never read them,” said a Hollander one day to a Paris infidel. This was not strictly true. Many Hollanders read Voltaire; but few became Voltairian infidels.

Look at Geneva. In vain had Voltaire been there to dazzle it with his wit, and deafen it with his bursts of laughter; Christianity continued to be held in honour there. She yielded to the torrent; but did not suffer herself to be swept along, so to speak, without carrying off with her the ancient baggage of her manners, her laws, her venerated traditions, and these we see her preserve when the tempest was at its worst. Her authors we find remaining Christian, not after the fashion of Rousseau, who was as little a Christian as he was a Genevese, but sincerely and honestly. Did they do so while shutting their ears? while isolating themselves in the midst of the movement? No; in everything else they took a part; nay, on some questions, they figured among the boldest inquirers. Abauzit—whom Rousseau would not have called *Socrates*,\* had he not known him to be far advanced in the questions of that day—Abauzit wrote the *Knowledge of Christ* and the *Honour due to Christ*, two of the best treatises that have been written on those subjects.

\* In a note to his *Nouvelle Héloïse*.

Bonnet, in philosophy, is sensualist and more than sensualist, for his doctrines sometimes go beyond those of Locke, Voltaire's master; well, Bonnet was Christian. Whence was it that, with one foot in the abyss, he drew the strength that enabled him to keep from sliding into it, and to fix his eyes on the heavens? Shall we find a single Roman Catholic, at this epoch, touching so closely on materialism, and yet remaining Christian? Here there was an inconsistency, if you will; but the greater the inconsistency, the more does it redound to the honour of the sentiments and the principles that were strong enough to produce it. That Tissot, too, whom we have seen bestowing so many eulogiums on Diderot, was Christian. That Tronchin, on whom Voltaire bestowed so many, and, whom he would have been so happy to *convert*, was Christian. Haller, the most learned man, perhaps, and the most truly universal genius of the eighteenth century, was Christian. That Herder, of whom the King of Prussia used to say that he knew everything, was Christian. That Court de Gebelin, who had all the Encyclopædists among his friends, was Christian. Look at Necker. He, too, was connected with all the unbelievers of the day; he presided in 1770, at the meeting where a statue was voted to Voltaire; and, even to his latest breath, you will find him speaking and writing in favour of Christianity. In 1793, alone, perhaps, among the advanced revolutionists, Rabaut Saint-Etienne was Christian, and Rabaut Sainte-Etienne was Protestant.

Why, then, is it that so many historians and critics, even such as are generally impartial, say not a word, or hardly a word, about the obstacles that infidelity will find among Protestants? People talk of the Abbé Guénée, the only man that seriously and learnedly made head against Voltaire on the field of the Old Testament; but they forget to add that he had taken his lessons in the school of the English apolo-

gists, and that he had begun by translating the work of Lord Littleton on St. Paul, Seed's *Discourses on the Bible*, and Wert's *Answers to Woolston's Objections*. The *Cosmological Letters* of Lambert, and the *Letters to a German Princess* by Euler, are cited; but not a word is said about these men being Protestants. Haller, who followed Voltaire step by step in his contests with the Bible, and who so powerfully contributed to the maintenance of the faith in Germany, is not so much as named among the apologists. The King of Prussia's infidelity is described in hideous characters; it is forgotten that he remained isolated in his kingdom. Some, and always the same English infidels are mentioned; but we are not told that these were chiefs who had few followers in their own country. Locke himself, whom the whole French school affected to call their chief, their father, Locke remained, practically, very far from the consequences drawn elsewhere from his ideas. Shaftesbury, in attacking him,\* declares that he had always looked upon him as a Christian. In England many of his disciples were Christian like himself; in France, not one was so.

At what epoch, moreover, was there an infidel school formed in England? At the death of Charles I.? In the midst of the republican deluge? No; but under Charles II. and James II., under the influence of France and Rome. The Christian reaction began with the overthrow of the Stuarts, and what well shows what part their reign had had in the progress of infidelity, most of the known infidels, and Bolingbroke in particular, were, and continued to be, Jacobites. Their influence declined all the more; and when Voltaire, in 1727, thought he was hailing a dawn, he was much rather hailing the advancing shades of evening. That man of all the English poets whom he most admired, whom he most

\* In his *Letters to a member of the University*.



praised, the friend of that same Bolingbroke, the author of that *Essay on Man*, from which the French philosophers, after Voltaire's example, were to draw so many dangerous inspirations—Pope, in fine, was Roman Catholic.

M. Villemain admits, indeed, at the commencement of his course, that unbelief has never ruled supreme in England, as it has reigned in France; but he sees no cause for this fact, but the mere freedom with which all opinions were allowed to develop themselves among the English. Open and underhand opposition, without doubt, contributed to popularize unbelief in France; but that liberty, where it existed, was of itself sufficient to neutralize efforts as powerful as those that succeeded in that country, is what we cannot admit. Behind liberty there were ramparts of spiritualism and of faith which Roman Catholicism, in France, had not known how to maintain, even under the protection of despotism.

II.—See, moreover, how Voltaire and his followers expressed their wonder, grief, and indignation at this. The Protestants, already treated as rebels by the French government, were almost rebels still in the eyes of those before whom all things began to bend.

Hence the little kindness they found, notwithstanding their calamities, among writers who neither had, nor could have, any dogmatical interest in hating them; hence, to return to the *Henriade*, the calumnies with which Voltaire made them pay so dearly for what he had said of them in his poem. On seeing them persist in remaining Christians, he seemed afraid, in some sort, lest the praises he had bestowed on them, might appear to have been given to Christianity, and, accordingly, he did his best to lessen their effect.

Had he, for example, to speak of fanaticism, he loved to adduce instances of Protestant fanaticism. True, there have

been such ; but it will be admitted that in presence of what they had suffered, and of what they were still suffering, it was hardly among them that he ought to have gone in search of odious or ridiculous proceedings.

Thus, in a letter on the subject of his *Mahomet*. "Those," he writes, "who say that the age of those crimes has passed away, do too much honour, in my view, to human nature." He is right, but what proofs does he adduce ? The Camisards, "the prophets of the Cevennes," says he, those people slaying in the name of God, "such of their sect as were not submissive enough."

There had in fact occurred, in the Cevennes, murders of this kind ; but how many ? A few, and these severely reprobated by nearly the whole body of Protestants, even at the very places where they were committed. Such were the facts that Voltaire was bold enough to cite in the face of the judicial murders, still committed every year on the persons of their ministers, at Montpellier, at Nimes, at Toulouse, at Grenoble, in short, wherever any one of those intrepid men could be laid hold of.

Some lines farther on, he comes to speak of the persecutions that reason had suffered. And what example does he then adduce ? Is it that of Galileo imprisoned for having said that the earth moved round the sun ? or Protestants consigned to the flames for having wished to reason upon what they were commanded to believe ? On the contrary, it is the Protestants whom he proceeds to exhibit as persecuting. "Superstition," says he, "does not always present the hemlock to Socrates ; but it gave to Jurieu, who played the prophet, credit enough to reduce Bayle to poverty."

Jurieu, without playing the prophet, had, in fact, denounced Bayle's leanings, as it was his right and his duty to do, because he thought them dangerous, and had thus led to his

being deprived of his professor's chair at Rotterdam. Here we see one single deposition put in the balance with all the most atrocious doings of the Inquisition in its opposition to the progress of reason and of liberty. Elsewhere still, we find him say,\*

" Bayle, by hot Jurieu hardly prest,  
The good with honour shall invest ;  
His bigot rival's name shall be  
Consign'd to public infamy."

Thus it was that the slightest act of treason against philosophy, or rather against infidelity, took its place among those objects of horror, among those memorials of the past, which the whole school affected to recall with a shudder. At the risk of legitimating the rigours still exercised against the Protestants of France, people loved, out of mere spite at their still remaining Christians, to insinuate that if they did not persecute, it was only because they had not the power to do so. And what Voltaire had said of them, more, perhaps, from levity than real hatred, Montesquieu proceeded seriously to repeat.

III.—But of the men whom Voltaire hated most truly, one was also a Protestant, and that one man was Calvin.

In his *Essay on Manners*, where the history of a century is sometimes condensed into four pages, the death of Servetus occupies a whole chapter, being just as much as the entire history of the Inquisition and of its reign. Now, why so much interest attached to Servetus, and so much horror to him whom it had been agreed, though very inaccurately, to charge as the author of his punishment? Why should this one execution occupy, in a universal history, as much room as ten thousand, nay, a hundred thousand others? It is because those who expired amid the flames of the Inquisition were but weak-minded Christians; whereas Servetus was a freethinker

\* *Discourse on Man.*

and an unbeliever. Was this, to say the least, really so? Was Voltaire sincere when he stretched out a fraternal hand to the Spaniard through the flames lit by Calvin? We cannot know up to what point he figured him to himself as the fellow-infidel of the infidels that lived after him; but what we very well know is, that Servetus was not such an infidel, and that, bold as he was for his time, he was a believer, and very much a believer, in comparison of the friends made for him by Voltaire.

Little solicitude, however, was felt about what he might have been; the essential matter was, that the common herd saw in him a precursor of modern hardihood in unbelief, and in Calvin, to whom none could refuse the character of being the most indomitable believer of his age, an atrocious persecutor. Such was the true cause of Voltaire's having no pity for Calvin. He followed him even into the other world; he devoted him to those everlasting punishments in which, in truth, he himself had no belief, yet which he seemed as if he would fain believe, in order that he might have Calvin to send to them. In one of the half-serious, half-burlesque descriptions of his *Philosophical Dictionary*, he introduces Calvin and the Cardinal de Lorraine disputing about a place in heaven. "Right in face of the Cardinal de Lorraine, was John Chauvin, who boasted, in his coarse, provincial dialect,\* of having kicked the papal idol after others had thrown it down. 'I have written against painting and sculpture,' said he; 'I have clearly demonstrated that good works are of no use, and I have proved that it is diabolical to dance a minuet.† Instantly expel from hence that Cardinal de Lorraine, and place me next to Saint Paul.' As he was speaking, there

\* Bossuet is more just. He ranks Calvin among the first founders of our language.

† In the *Philosophical Letters*. Voltaire seems quite to have approved of the cutting off an author's ears, under Charles I., for having written against stage-plays.

was seen near him a stake, with kindled faggots. A dreadful spectre, with a half-consumed Spanish frieze on his neck, came out of the flames, uttering frightful cries. 'Monster,' he exclaimed, 'execrable monster, see Servetus before you,' &c. Then the judges—the judges were Confucius, Solon, Epictetus, all Voltaire's saints, in fine, with the exception, however, of his everlasting Julian—the judges ordain the Cardinal de Lorraine to be flung into the abyss, but that a still worse punishment (which Voltaire does not specify) should be prepared for Calvin. So, then, he is punished more for one death than a cardinal who had ordered or approved of thousands.

IV.—Not only did they endeavour to crush every man, living or dead, whom they could not make one of the soldiers of the phalanx, but no shame was felt in passing judgment on the greatest matters under points of view suggested by the most paltry spite, in displaying open partiality, and openly preferring the interests of party to justice, to honour, and to philosophy itself.

Nothing less philosophical, in fact, even when there was no direct interest in being unjust, than the historical judgments of Voltaire. He is not always in the wrong; but one would say, that once in the wrong, he tries to plunge into error as deeply as possible; whereas, when in the right, he never leaves the surface. An entirely just and good idea he is content to state, and you may not find it again in the whole course of his works; a false and dangerous idea he never quits till he has exhausted it, and he will return to it twenty times in twenty different places, at the distance of twenty, nay, of forty years. The consequences to be drawn from a true, important, and frequent fact, are soon drawn; those of a silly, inaccurate fact, possibly invented, or at least modified,

by himself, he fondly studies and dwells upon. Small facts, moreover, always please him more than great ones; and where he finds only great facts, these he must needs fitter down and depreciate. His mind was vast only in the rapidity of its movements, and powerful only in its impetuosity and audaciousness. He could not take in a thousand things at a glance; he had only the faculty of seeing them successively within the same time that another man would have taken to see a part of them. Capable of darting instantaneously over the whole circumference of the intellectual world, he could, indeed, from time to time approach its centre, and even by some felicitous spring, reach that centre; but to maintain himself there, to command, from that point, the horizons of history or of the soul, was what he neither could do, nor seriously wished to do. Never had those piercing eyes of his that calm and comprehensive range which is the special property and the distinctive characteristic of the true kings of the human understanding.

Wanting in point of reach, shall we say that his judgment was not at least wanting in rectitude? Few men, it must be confessed, have ever seemed endowed with a practical sense more delicate and more sure. If clearness, precision, and incisiveness of style are certain signs of a sound judgment, what style was ever more precise, more clear, more incisive than his? Who would not admire "that style so firm, transparent, and solid, so elegant and precise, so exact and easy; abundant, curt, unencumbered, unstudied, broken, dry, elastic, impetuous; neglecting all ordinary ligatures, risking the abruptest transitions, yet consecutive, and linked together by unlooked-for ties which rise one knows not how, and come one knows not whence; ever following out an idea step by step, observing all its whims and caprices, bending to all its movements, bounding forward or pausing, according as it

bounds forward or pauses, without ever overleaping it or falling short of it."\* Never had a man more constantly the air, not only of being in the right, but of being incapable of being in the wrong. And yet, without even going to his grossest errors, how many of his reasonings do we find inaccurate and incomplete! How many facts seen from only one point of view! He spent his time in arguing for exceptions against the rule, for abuses against use, for evil against good. We see him abandoning himself, without a struggle, not only to passions which would not allow him to be just, but to that prodigious mobility which subjected his reason to the influence of the thousand accidents of each successive day. We find wit and good sense often meeting in him; but if an option has to be made, he does not hesitate; we ever find him witty rather than accurate, piquant rather than wise.

V.—He was fond, we have said, of frittering down and depreciating great things. This is what he did, with no less good-will, for great men, and perhaps it is an additional proof that he was not one himself. We have observed that he led the age in which he lived by following it; we might add that he did not even understand any other way of leading it, and that it is thus that he sometimes errs so egregiously in the judgment he forms of the providential guides of other ages. Each of those in his eyes was entirely comprised in a fact, in an anecdote, in a saying; fact, anecdote, saying, always chosen, it need not be said, in that which is or in that which is not glorious for the personage in question, according as that personage has a good or a bad mark put on him in the papers of the school. Calvin, whom he detests, is wholly comprised in the death of Servetus. Luther, whom he does not detest, yet whom he has no wish to praise, is wholly comprised in the

\* Romain-Cornut, *Discours sur Voltaire*.

coarse jests with which Bossuet had previously reproached him. He knows not, and he has no wish to know, that that jesting pen could write also what was beautiful, poetical, and grand; he would have thought himself lost in the eyes of the age had he owned that a monk might be a profound thinker, a great writer, a great man. Besides, in refusing him this title, he has no thought of being unjust; both the grandeur of the part Luther acted and that of the character he bore, entirely escape him. It is the same with respect to Calvin. One feels that even had he not detested him, still he would have made of him but a paltry enough personage. Evidently he understood nothing of the great movement of the sixteenth century. The men who produced it, were no more in his eyes than children fluttering about in a kind of twilight between the darkness of the past and the gleam of dawn that harbingered the future sun. Calvin was but the clever Picard who cracked the chestnuts after others had taken them out of the fire. Luther was but the Augustinian monk who exclaimed against indulgences because the Dominicans were about to draw all the profits arising from them. Beyond this Voltaire could not go. "You are not ignorant,"\* you will find him say, "that this great revolution in the human mind, and in the political system of Europe, commenced with Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, who was commissioned by his superiors to preach against the wares which they could not sell." One error more this time. Where had he seen that Luther received orders to do what he did? But let us keep to our remark on this complete forgetfulness of great causes. In his *Thoughts on the public administration*, he is still more trenchant. "Had Leo X. given the sale of indulgences to the Augustinian monks who were in possession of the traffic in those wares, there would have been no Protestants."

\* *Essay on Manners*, cxxviii.



Thus he does not even go so far as to comprehend that the Reformation was intimately connected with the emancipation of the mind and of the sciences. He saw its dogmatical side only, that is to say, from his point of view, its ridiculous and absurd side. He does not say that the Protestants did wrong in revolting against the Church, or that the Church did wrong in combating them; he consigns both, in their quality of Christians, to immeasurable contempt. "We are about to speak of those dissensions which put human reason to the blush." Such are the terms with which, in his *Age of Louis XIV.*, he commences the history of Calvinism. We need not reproach the unbeliever for having seen nothing but what was contemptible in the matters that were debated between Romanism and the Reformation; but how can we forgive the historian and the philosopher for not having had at least some perception of the questions of all kinds that were agitated under these? Philosophy, morals, politics, the sciences, all, in the sixteenth century, were comprised in theology, and to judge those men as mere divines, who played great parts in those times, is tantamount to not understanding them at all.

He does not admit, besides, or rather he does not comprehend, that this revolution could anywhere have arisen from a real and sincerely felt want, or could be propagated otherwise than by an "epidemic fury" of controversy and futile reasonings; he comes openly to the aid of those Roman Catholic historians who would fain see nothing in the Reformation but hypocrisy and rebellion.

It is true, that his judgments, at bottom, are no more favourable to the one party than to the other, for he absolutely refuses to acknowledge that man's religious longings have any legitimate influence on human affairs. All Christians, without exception, he reproaches for having made reason blush by

their quarrels; every religious dispute, however lofty the subject of it, he declares "unworthy of honest people." Only, as he was in a Roman Catholic country, he thought it prudent to attack Protestants only. He will have it that the rage of controversy alone animated their first leaders; that the prospect of Church spoliation was the sole cause of their first successes. The old doctrines that had been embraced by the Waldenses, the Albigenses, the Hussites, renewed and differently explained by Luther and Zwingli, were greedily received in Germany as a pretext for seizing so many of the lands of which the bishops and abbots were possessed.\* These motives had their influence; but to refuse to see any other, was to make a jest of common sense and of history. Even in denying religious motives, there remained at least the philosophical motives, the burst of feeling, good or bad, which gave a forward impulse to all the thinkers of those times.

VI.—We have not, however, to compose here an apology for the Reformation. We would only show at how cheap a cost people could satisfy themselves in the study of causes, without which, nevertheless, there can be no philosophy of history. We shall, ere long, have to inquire how far Montesquieu really formed any exception in this respect.

With Voltaire, it is true, this was not merely an error; it was a system. So also when great causes appear without any necessity for digging deep in order to see them, he still prefers the small ones, and even invents them when necessary, for the pleasure of opposing them to great effects. Contrasts amuse him, and he hopes to amuse his readers with them; next, it is one way among others of discrediting Providence, and of quietly denying it. While the believer wonders that it should cost God so little to change a people, an age, a world, the

\* *Age of Louis XIV.*

unbeliever has inverted the question : it is the small fact, on the contrary, it is the imperceptible cause, that has upset the plans of God ; it is chance that has subverted, by one of its merest caprices, what good people attributed to the action of an infinitely great and wise God.

Fontenelle had inaugurated, in his *Dialogues of the Dead*, this indirect warfare against faith in an active and superintending Deity. Almost the only occupation of his dead, is to show the under-side of the cards of all great events. They play off their witty jests at those who thought the causes great because the effects were so ; they give themselves out in good earnest as having made with nothings the destiny of the world, and they do not perceive that if those nothings are capable of all this, it is because they are linked to causes very profound and real. Can it be that there are nothings with God ? The unbeliever will show you a grain of sand, the fall of which, says he, has determined the slip of a mountain. Yes, replies the believer ; but that grain of sand fell because God desired that it should fall.

Fontenelle, with his usual reserve, took good care to draw no conclusions ; Voltaire, with greater hardihood, drew his conclusions. God, according to him, has abandoned the world to the caprices of men and of things ; he almost goes so far as, making God after his own image, to represent him as in the highest heavens diverting himself with our embarrassments and our follies. Insidious and refined in *Zadig*, coarse enough elsewhere, the accusing of Providence lies perpetually at the bottom of the thoughts of Voltaire ; not one of his lightest pamphlets, not one of his prettiest stories but leaves with you an after-taste of this. Say not that it was a side that he had taken ; it was more than that, it was his very nature. He had been born in revolt ; he was to live and to die in revolt. *Candide*, the infernal *Candide*, is but one of the epi-

sodes of this incessant war. *Candide* is the most frightfully gay picture of all the miseries of human life. "It is," it has been said, "the laugh of Satan himself, that laugh into which he burst when he dived back in triumph into the abyss, after having polluted the world's virgin infancy, and thrown dolour and death into the bowels of disgraced humanity."\* We have no liking, in general, for a man being made a devil; but we can conceive how, after having read *Candide*, one should find no other expression for what he has experienced.

His *Essay on Manners* is but a long diatribe in support of the same thesis. His only aim, one would say, was to continue, in an inverse sense, the *Discourse on Universal History*. There, God is everywhere and in everything; here, He is nowhere. It is true that Bossuet often goes a little too far. He does not confine himself to exhibiting God as holding the threads of all human affairs; he would have it that all things that God has done or permitted, since the creation of the first man, have been co-ordained with an eye to one single event, the establishment of Christianity. This is a grand and fine idea; but is it just? It may be so one day. When the whole world, as we hope on the faith of high promises, shall have become Christian, then, it may be, this magnificent unity in the plan of God will become apparent, but that we can already see it in the past, as Bossuet maintains, evident and incontestable, is what we do not admit. In order to his seeing it, he had to leave in the shade a multitude of nations not yet associated with it by any visible tie, and had to give the title of *universal* history to a history of a third part of the human race. All is not eulogy perhaps in that fine name that has sometimes been given him, of *Prophet of the past*. A prophet affirms, he does not prove. He sets forth the plans of God; but he cannot actually demonstrate that he is right; that, the

\* Romain-Cornut, *Discours sur Voltaire*.

future alone can do. Bossuet, in this sense, is but too often a prophet.

But Voltaire is at the opposite extreme. Those nations that have remained beyond the sphere of Christianity, are those which he is fond of putting in strong relief, and praising and exalting at every turn. Not only does he accept and repeat their most incredible traditions, as soon as they are found opposed to those of the Bible, but he will have it that those nations were more enlightened, more wise, more learned even, than those of the Christian world. The conclusion, naturally, is, either that God has greatly misplaced His favours, or that they have done no great good to those on whom they have been bestowed, or rather—for this, as we shall come to see, is his grand theme—that God occupies Himself equally little about both, and that it is folly and falsehood to talk of our being enlightened by Him.

## CHAPTER IX.

I.—Rules followed in the eighteenth century in the appreciation of the ancient philosophers—Plato—Socrates: who was worshipped in worshipping him?—II—How useful a good critical history of his reputation would be—Everybody has had an interest in vaunting him—Errors that have been diffused respecting him—Aristophanes—The condemnation of Socrates: was it really what it has been represented?—*Erasmus and Socrates*, by Palissot—His familiar demon—The oracle—Sophism or Scepticism—Cato's opinion—We must not allow ourselves to be blinded by an interesting death.

WE have remarked Voltaire's admiration for the Chinese; we have spoken also of his indulgence for the religious absurdities of the pagans. As for their philosophers, much as they were to be preferred, according to him, to all who have had Christianity for their guide, he was very far, however, from admiring them all in proportion to the elevation to which each of them had been raised above the ideas of the vulgar. Those who were simply unbelievers, were infinitely more noted, in the whole French school, than those who attempted to substitute something in the place of the gross beliefs which they had shaken off. Plato was a dreamer, an ideologist, almost a Christian, which was saying everything. Socrates was the thinker in the full sense of the word, the *beau-idéal* of a philosopher, the god of reason. But why put two men so wide apart, the one of whom only developed the ideas of the other? Just because what was chiefly seen in Socrates was a man put to death for having attacked his country's religion, and, on that sole account, he was the hero,

the saint of the sect. The Socrates who was thus worshipped was not the apostle of the soul's immortality, but the Diderot or the Voltaire of the doctrines of antiquity.

We must here repeat what we have already said. It is not enough to know who was in repute at such or such an epoch, we must further inquire wherefore, and in what way. Let us call to mind the child whom Rousseau mentions as full of admiration, when he was told of the famous trait of character in Alexander when sick, and who, when asked what he thought was so very fine in it, was found to have admired only the courage he had shown in swallowing a dose. Ages, on this point, are too often no better than children, only without their unaffected sincerity; and were they sincere, too many people have an interest in deceiving them. No sooner is a man defunct, than we know not how to honour him without making him a little like ourselves; and as among the heathens, the same god was sometimes quite different in the north from what he was in the south, the same man, likewise, has often been quite a different person in the eyes of two neighbouring nations, or at two different epochs. The dead would sometimes feel not a little amazed, could they see what their reputations became, according to times and places, under the pens of their admirers.

II.—We should much like, we confess, to see a good critical history of that of Socrates. Extolled to the skies by Christians as having made the nearest approach that reason could make to the truths of revelation, and by the unbelievers of all ages for his boldness in undermining the dogmas of the common herd of men, there have barely been heard, at distant intervals, in the course of twenty centuries, some words of doubt as to his claims to this universal admiration. The gravest historians go on repeating on this subject the grossest

inaccuracies. His condemnation, to believe them, was owing to the *Clouds* of Aristophanes, which preceded it by twenty years,\*—that very Aristophanes of whom we see Plato remaining the friend. With respect to that condemnation, moreover, it were well that before blaming it so much as unjust, and before denouncing those who provoked it, we should ask, once for all, what it really was. All well to say that nobody should be put to death for their opinions; but this is a modern opinion which is not even universally admitted, and why should we wonder at its not entering the heads of pagans, when even Christians have been found so slow to adopt it? Men have wept over the fate of Socrates, and have warmly denounced his judges, who, nevertheless, thought it fit and right to burn one of their fellows to teach him not to be foolhardy in religion. Socrates had been so, and very much so. He had even been so in the very worst manner, swearing, for his amusement, if we are to believe what some authors have related, by a stone, or by a dog; and although these facts were not authentic, enough of others show us how little he cared about wounding, not only false ideas, but even sentiments that deserved respect. Who could seriously maintain that where death was inflicted as a punishment for such irreverences, Socrates did not deserve it?

Was he, on the other hand, as a man, deserving of that elevated position in which people have been pleased to contemplate him? The disorders of his youth have been denied by some historians, though admitted by others; they might not, therefore, have been an invention of his enemies, and, though we may feel repugnant to believe them, this ought at least to be a reason for our not blindly abandoning ourselves to a traditional admiration.

\* Brumoy, in his *Théâtre des Grecs* had exposed this mistake, but it was persisted in nevertheless.



One of the few authors who did not bow before Voltaire, Palissot, gives us an imaginary dialogue between Socrates himself and a man who was one of his greatest admirers, Erasmus, who was tempted, he used to say, to add to the litanies of the saints, *Sancte Socrates, ora pro nobis*. In this curious dialogue, in which, notwithstanding, the author has only brought together well-known details, Socrates advises that too much confidence should not be put in Plato, who made him serve his own purposes while he was living, and did so still more when he was dead. A dead man who had had no enemies, said he, easily carried it over the living who had them. The proof that it was a factitious reaction, lies in the Athenians having kept the religion which he had attacked, and in the name of which they had condemned him to death. He had accepted his condemnation as in conformity with his country's laws: why should people make themselves out to be juster judges than he himself? Thus speaks, and with much sense, the Socrates of Palissot.

But returning to the true Socrates, what next shall we say of the familiar spirit of which he was only, he would say, the pupil and the interpreter? If he believed in it, what shall we think of his reason? If he did not believe in it, what shall we think of his sincerity? Voltaire, who liked to throw a stone from time to time at his best friends, could not forget this point. In a short piece on Locke,\* after going over some insoluble questions: "Socrates' demon," he adds, "would no doubt have told him how the matter stood. There are people, in truth, who maintain that a man who boasted of his having a familiar genius, was undoubtedly either somewhat of a fool or somewhat of a rogue, but such folks are too hard to please."

Are we to believe that an oracle declared him to be the

\* *Mélanges de littérature, d'histoire, et de philosophie*, ch. xxxiv.

wisest of the Greeks? It is curious that so many who doubtless scarcely believe in the authority of oracles, would fain lean on this one; and if they mean no more by adducing it than to point to it as a manifestation of public opinion with regard to Socrates, one may still reply that it was very far from being the general opinion, seeing that he was, in the end, condemned. Was it, then, so difficult to make oracles speak? Does any one imagine that had there been oracles at this day in France, men who have proclaimed themselves sages, would not have found ways and means to get some of them to speak in their favour?

"All that I know," he would say, "is, that I know nothing." He has been praised for this modesty; but we have here only one of those sayings which people repeat without well knowing what they mean, and which say, at bottom, anything you please. Socrates had reason to laugh at the sophists who affected to know everything; but to say, "I know nothing," is a sophism also, or at the least a play upon words. If not that, it is something worse, for we must needs see in it the opinion of a sceptic, who does not wish that certainty should be possible, and who renounces the hope of seeing it anywhere. Let us not forget that the austere Cato, whose judgment was probably guided by better traditional knowledge than ours, called Socrates a great talker, and that his conduct at Athens appeared to him only that of a violent and dangerous man. Cato, it is true, had no great liking for philosophers; but we judge of them a little too much, in general, by the attestations of their friends. When we see what party spirit is capable of doing, among the moderns, for men who have hardly gone down to the tomb, it may teach us to distrust a little those more ancient reputations which similar circumstances might have concurred to exalt. Had Voltaire drunk the hemlock, and had the lustre of a heroic death

still further emboldened his disciples, there would be also, in the eyes of many people, a sort of sacrilege in attacking him. Socrates was of more worth than Voltaire; but we must not allow a fine death-scene, the affair of a moment, and one which many men are capable of furnishing, to blind us to the imperfections of a long life, or condemn us to be silent in the presence of those who abuse it to their own purposes.

## CHAPTER X.

- I.—History in the eighteenth century—What was meant by a philosophical historian—Montesquieu : history of his reputation—The *Persian Letters*—With what feelings the *Spirit of Laws* was looked for—Public Eulogiums ; secret judgments—Voltaire, Grimm, Collé, Dupin, Rousseau, Helvetius, Saurin.
- II.—*L'esprit* on Laws—What *l'esprit* meant according to Voltaire—The *Spirit of Laws* answers to that definition—Minute divisions ; oddities—Rigour in forms, and want of exactness in essence—Skirmishings between genius and wit—The author never stops in time—Correct even to dulness, or negligent even to caprice—Many apocryphal facts and errors—Some examples—The author, then, has shown a want of philosophy in details.—III.—He shows a like want of it in his general views—All science begins with empiricism—False course pursued by Montesquieu—Geometry in history—*Virtue, honour, fear*—To bring all to one unique problem—Fatality—Phrenology in history.
- IV.—Nature of the eulogiums bestowed on the *Spirit of Laws*—Every one saw in it what he wished to see—Lacretelle—Indirect admissions—Better to have been candid.
- V.—Summary of criticisms—The work has no conclusion—Few people read it to the end—Illusions of the author—Invocation to the Muses—The *Defence of the Spirit of Laws*—Ever the *Persian Letters*.

THUS, to return to the eighteenth century, and to its want of sound historical criticism, history was a field entered upon by the greater number of writers, not for the purpose of clearing uncultivated spots, there being little taste for that kind of toil, or even of reaping such or such a corner already brought into cultivation, but to gather up a little everywhere, taking, leaving, and mingling together at will. It was this liberty, this license, to speak more correctly, and this impudence, which obtained the name of the philosophy of history. The philosophical historian was the man who contrived to bring out of facts all that the philosophy of the day required.

"Voltaire never will write a good history. He is like the monks, who do not write for the subject of which they treat, but for the glory of their order. Voltaire wrote for his conventual brotherhood."

So said Montesquieu,\* and never more truly. But Montesquieu himself, we have said, formed no exception.

It is time to justify an assertion which has, doubtless, seemed rash, and which, perhaps, will hardly seem less to be so after what we shall have said to establish it. Montesquieu's reputation is like that of Socrates; in attempting to shake it, we but lose our pains. Would you hence conclude that it rests on solid foundations? It would equally prove that it rests one knows not well on what, and that, if it defies criticism, it is because it subsists beyond the rules of criticism, beyond the reach of a sound and serious appreciation. "Once on a time," says M. Villemain, "I thought I had seen in Montesquieu's work a learned composition, complete in all its parts. Everything in it appeared methodical and luminous. *On further study, I understood it less.*" This is what we, too, shall, ere long, say of the book; it is what we say, meanwhile, of the reputation itself of the author. Analyse it, and you find it inexplicable.

As respects its foundations, first of all, let us be permitted to put one or two questions.

Without the *Persian Letters*, would the *Spirit of Laws* have met with any success? Possibly it might; but certainly with not so much.

Would there have been any relish for the *Spirit of Laws*, even after the *Persian Letters* had appeared, but for those few chapters in which Montesquieu brought his tribute to the inexorable demands of the time? There would have been little, very little. Five-sixths of the book—nine-tenths of it, per-

\* *Pensées diverses*—(Divers Reflections).

haps, had nothing of a nature to captivate the common herd of readers. Without those few chapters, the *Spirit of Laws* might have taken its place till doomsday beside the researches of a Dubos, the *great man*, and Montesquieu would have remained great man—after the fashion of Dubos.

But the *Persian Letters* had given the measure of what was the author's daring. The *Spirit of Laws* was expected to be the complement of his former freaks. For twenty years, people had been prepared to hail the appearance of his book as the gospel of modern liberalism. His work could not fail, be it what it might, to make an immense noise. All the trumpets were in readiness. They sounded with a deafening clang, and the sound has reached even our day. "Mankind had lost its titles," cried that master of reputations, Voltaire; "Montesquieu has found them again, and has restored them."

But all this praise was for the public. We must see how people treated, in secret, this book which they had put upon their altars, how they treated it openly, after they had once got the advantage from it which they had coveted. Nay, more; it is certain that the chief leaders of the party hesitated, at first, about adopting it. They thought it long and tedious; too incisive in many places, too pliant in others; above all, they could not digest the praises bestowed by the author, however dryly, on the Christian religion. But those few eulogiums, greedily caught at by the clergy, then at their last extremity, threatened to give the book a reputation for orthodoxy, which might hardly have any longer made it serviceable. Accordingly, it was laid hold of, and no sooner adopted than it had, of course, to be proclaimed a masterpiece.

We say not, be it observed, that this is not, at least in some respects, its character; we only inquire what was really thought of it by those who proclaimed its being so. Here we

are behind the curtain, and cannot but open our eyes to what is passing there.

Well, then, the correspondence of Voltaire, D'Alembert, Grimm, and Helvetius, Collé's *Journal Historique*, together with a thousand details scattered through the memoirs of those times, all agree with what we have said as to the manner in which the *Spirit of Laws* was criticized by those who were thrusting it on the admiration of Europe.

Voltaire, it has been said, was jealous. It is very possible; but if many of his remarks are more ill-natured than just, there are many also, as we shall soon see, where he is evidently in the right.

Grimm, like the whole of the party, admires in the gross, cries anathema to all who will not admire, and no sooner begins to explain himself in detail, than farewell to admiration.

Collé, whose ill-written *Journal* recommends itself by an independence which was rare enough, at that time, among second-rate authors, candidly relates the whole affair. After saying that he had been *amused* with the first volume, and tired with the second, "This is what I have felt," he adds; "this is what is said by authors and metaphysicians, by all, in short, that have a little philosophy in their heads. They maintain that it is a work without order, without connexion, without sequence of ideas, without principles; it is, they say, the portfolio of a clever man, and that is all."

Dupin, the farmer-general, having made a collection of the criticisms of men of letters and others who used to meet at his house, printed them in three volumes. These volumes had passed through the press when, through the intervention of Madame de Pompadour, the author was prevailed upon to stop their sale. Dupin carried his complaisance so far as even to destroy the edition, with the exception of some twenty or

thirty copies, all in the hands of devoted friends. But the secret came out. Voltaire speaks of the work with high praise, and admits his having taken from it the greater part of his criticisms, which did not prevent him, according to custom, from anathematizing whosoever should dare to make use of it in openly attacking Montesquieu's reputation. Crevier, for having done much the same thing as Dupin, was denounced as a monster and a fool.

Rousseau seemed, at first, more sincere in his admiration of the *Spirit of Laws*. One day that he heard it disputed whether Montesquieu was really the author of the work—"If that book is not his," said he, "who, then, is the god that composed it?" And yet, looking at the collective character of his own writings, we may boldly assert that the book did not please him, and to him could not seem a very good book. He had the art of not attacking it openly, for he was more subtle, under all his great outward show of frankness, than Voltaire, with all that perfect ease with which he could practise dissimulation and falsehood; but there is too wide a distance betwixt his ideas and Montesquieu's, that it should be possible for him, except in the first period of his acquaintance with it, and before he had written himself, to have seriously admired the *Spirit of Laws*. In 1748, Rousseau was a devoted member of the *côté* that was interested in extolling Montesquieu to the skies.

Helvetius, to whom the *Spirit of Laws* was communicated before its publication, "thought it," says M. Villemain, "feeble, behind the age, and, trembling for the glory of his friend, he would have had him withdraw it from the press." Helvetius had not had the courage to say to the author directly what he thought of his book. He had communicated his opinion of it to Saurin, who was also a friend of Montesquieu's; and the two judges for a long time threw upon each



other the painful task of telling him how far short his book had come of what had been expected of him.

II.—But these men possibly were incapable of forming an adequate judgment of the work ; perhaps their public eulogiums, although far from sincere, were more just than their private criticisms.

A few words, then, on the principal private opinions as to its merits.

The *Spirit of Laws* is “ Spirit (Wit) on Laws,” had been said of it by Madame du Deffand ; and great thereupon had been the indignation of Montesquieu’s admirers.

What is *l’esprit* ? “ *L’esprit*,” says, Voltaire,\* “ is sometimes a novel comparison, sometimes a subtle allusion ; here, it is the abuse of a word given in one sense and allowed to be taken up in another, there, it is a delicate relation between two uncommon ideas. It is a singular metaphor ; it is a search for what a subject does not at first present, yet of what it, in fact, comprehends ; it is the art of combining two things that are remote, or of dividing two things that appear to be united, or of opposing the one to the other ; it is the art of uttering but half what one thinks, and leaving the other half to be guessed. In fine, I would speak of all the different ways of showing what *l’esprit* is, had I more of it myself.”†

Such, it seems to us, is one of the best definitions of *l’esprit* that has ever appeared. It is quoted everywhere, and deservedly so.

Let it be taken, then, and let us be told whether Montesquieu’s book does not answer to it far too closely for a work of the kind.

\* *Dictionnaire Philosophique*—(Philosophical Dictionary).

† I have not attempted to give an English synonym for a word which Voltaire found it so difficult to define. Wit, perhaps, is the nearest approach to it. But we never could say, the Wit of Laws.—*Trans.*

Everywhere we find sketches; everywhere difficulties eluded; everywhere, even in those parts where there is really some depth, arguments cut facetwise, phrases thrown in for mere effect, sentences closed abruptly, even witticisms, some excellent, others stale enough, and, perhaps, on two or three occasions, gross enough withal; everywhere *l'esprit*, in fine, good or bad, except in that passage in the preface where the author makes an awkward enough attempt to anticipate this charge by excusing his falling into the very contrary. "One will not find here," he says, "those bold touches which seem to characterize the writings of the present day. However little we may enlarge our views of things, their salient points disappear; they ordinarily originate only in the mind's throwing itself all on one side and abandoning all the others." No words could better express our meaning, when we charge the *Spirit of Laws* with being a work of *esprit*. "I have found the *esprit* of the author, who has much of it," said Voltaire in 1765,\* "and rarely the *esprit* of the laws. He rather skips than walks, amuses rather than enlightens, and is sometimes more satirical than judicious."

Form plays so large a part in the book that one may certainly be allowed to ask, whether this be indeed the form of a serious work, or if a serious work, in such a form, does not somewhat lose its character of being so.

What are we to say, first of all, of those endless divisions and subdivisions—thirty-one books; more than six hundred chapters. What shall we say of the distribution of the matters they contain? The twenty-sixth book has twenty-five chapters, the twenty-eighth has forty-five, and the twenty-seventh, between those two, has but one. There are chapters of ten pages each, and others of ten lines, of four lines, of two

\* *Idées Républicaines*—(Republican Ideas).

lines. Often they are the shortest that you find followed by another, by two others, even by three others, all very short, and all entitled, *Continuation of the same subject*. In the demonstrations, sometimes the principle and the examples are brought together in the same chapter; sometimes you find a single example form a chapter apart, with a meaningless or odd-looking title. One would say, that some mischievous wit had, for his amusement, parcelled out the text and travestied the titles.

Montesquieu has evidently, by these divisions and subdivisions, sought that rigorous accuracy which he felt he could not reach by the natural development of his principles. Was this for the purpose of mystifying his readers? He has been accused of such deception, and it is not easy, in fact, in some passages at least, to avoid seeing a little calculation and cunning. We should rather say—it were more respectful, and perhaps also more just—that in this he had deluded himself, and believed he was more exact in reality because he was so in show. But the more faith we can have in his sincerity, the more shall we feel at our ease in seriously and frankly noticing the defects of his book.

If there be any one thing in which genius and wit (*le bel esprit*), the greatest and the smallest of the human faculties, can alike have complacency, it is in those bold generalisations, in that perception of remote resemblances, in which we must recognise either the far-seeing glance of the eagle, or the mere result of a kind of optical trick.

Such is the alternative in which, while studying Montesquieu, you find yourself almost constantly placed. He has often the eagle's far-seeing ken; yet he can rarely refrain from optical tricks, even when soaring high enough to permit his dispensing with them.

"If I needs must," you find him say, in his *Pensées Diver-*

ses, "characterize our poets, I would compare Corneille to Michael Angelo, and Racine to Raphael." . . .

Excellent ; but see how he follows it up. He will have the parallel complete, that each painter shall have for his pendant a poet, each poet a painter. Marot is Correggio ; La Fontaine, Titian ; Boileau, Dominichino ; Crebillon, Guercino ; Voltaire, Guido ; Fontenelle, Bernini ; La Motte, Rembrandt, &c. In regard to the first names, he was sufficiently in the right ; but where was he as respects the last ?

And this is what he has often done, on a much larger scale, in the appreciation of events and of laws. So, also, where he is in the right at starting, he rarely ends without being in the wrong, without, at least, landing in arbitrary assertions, in which, if not manifestly in the wrong, he is as certainly not in the right.

Accuracy, accordingly, is often found much more in the titles than in the text ; it is found in the principles, or rather in the statement of principles, much more than in the developments which go before or follow. There are chapters in which the author merely repeats the title without adding anything that deserves the name of proof, without so much as attempting to say what looks like proof ; there are chapters, also, in which you hardly find anything that the title indicates, so that the author seems at times the slave of his divisions, at other times a capricious being who allows his thoughts to wander at random.

Those assertions which he so boldly lays down as axioms of legislation or of history, have often no better foundation than some solitary and perhaps more than doubtful fact related on the credit of some doubtful traveller or historian. How much use, for example, has he made of the Byzantine historians ; so full of idle tales. How many such tales has he not collected himself, not only about Japan and China, but

about more than one of the peoples of Europe! He has been mistaken, in many places, even with respect to the countries through which he had travelled, such as Italy, Switzerland, and England itself, which he was understood to have so thoroughly studied, and to have seen to such advantage;\* and as his object, in adducing facts, is always to draw consequences from them, with him no errors are of slight moment; each draws after it at least one other, and sometimes a whole series.

Voltaire has pointed out several of these singular generalisations, yet is far from having noticed them all. Helvetius, whose remarks are found in some editions of Montesquieu, is occasionally wrong in his fault-finding, but how often also is he right! Montesquieu often appreciates with genius; but often, too, where no more was required than some common sense and a little criticism, he plunges into false conclusions. The blunder, even though purely historical, is sometimes so complete, so enormous, that one might be tempted to set it down as an error of the press. What would be thought at the present day of a historian who should make Christopher Columbus a cotemporary of Francis I. ?† Little scrupulous as to facts drawn from his own recollection or observation, Montesquieu is still less so with respect to those which he can screen behind a name of some weight. He never discusses the ancient historians; it is enough that a fact suits his purpose in order to its possessing in his eyes all requisite authenticity, and even then it is well if he does not allow himself to exaggerate or to extenuate it, according as the hypothesis he is maintaining may require.

That the man whose sole object it is to tell a story should

\* His *Pensées sur l'Angleterre*—(Thoughts on England)—contain instances of levity that are almost past belief. To be sure they are mere notes, jotted down in haste; but some of them are passing strange even for notes.

† Book xxi. ch. 22.

not trouble himself too much about ascertaining how far what he relates is true, may be conceived and excused, although it is not what a genuine historian would do; but that he who relates facts for the purpose of explanation, and of deducing consequences and laws, should not, first of all, see to the facts being real, and, supposing them to be real, that he should not ascertain how far they form an adequate basis for what he proposes to establish, is to exhibit either a want of conscience, or certainly a want of philosophy.

III.—Philosophy, then, was that in which Montesquien was mainly wanting. We have seen that here he was wanting in point of form; and this he virtually admitted, in calling to his aid a piece of stage effect quite unworthy of his subject. That here, too, he was wanting in substance we proceed to see, and to prove it have only to bring together the concessions which his admirers have been forced to make. Those of M. Villemain would of themselves form a sum-total, after seeing which, one would find it difficult not to be somewhat astonished at the eulogiums amid which he enshrines them.

But it is not only as respects historical truth that we discover defects in Montesquien's philosophy.

Nothing less philosophical, in fact—if by philosophical we mean exact and true—than the general system he has followed, and to which he attributes, sincerely, the whole value and success of his work.

Here, we own, it is not so much he himself that is directly in fault. All the sciences and all the arts have begun with empiricism, and political science could not escape this untoward necessity. Only, it is odd that it should have fallen into it so fully, at a time when all other sciences were casting themselves loose from their old yoke, and placing observation at the basis of all that they taught.

"I have laid down principles," wrote Montesquieu, accordingly, in his preface, "and I have seen particular cases adapt themselves to these, as it were, spontaneously."

*Spontaneously!* We might answer him at once on this word, by saying, that the work should not have cost him twenty years.

No, it was not spontaneously that the facts adapted themselves to his principles; it was by continual efforts of ingenuity, and even of genius, that he succeeded in adapting the former to the latter, with more or less success. One might say of his book what Diderot had said of that of Helvetius: "There is too much method in his method. Highways are necessary, but they must be wide, and they must not be lines."

Now, lines—mathematical lines—are what Montesquieu attempts to trace in the sinuous and capricious field of history. But in a science where effects and causes mutually modify and cross each other, and are infinitely intermingled, geometrical accuracy can only be a perpetual sophism, or, at least, a perpetual effort of ingenuity. Even in the exact sciences, there are many principles which, though true in themselves, would be absurd in practice. We are told, for example, that a cube is formed by the movement of a plane. This is what gives us the exact idea, in fact, of a regular cube. But has this definition any relation to the material conditions on which a cubical body actually exists? Would a geometrician ever attempt to create a cube by the movement of a plane, or explain by the movement of a plane the creation of a real material cube? Yet this is what those affect to do, who in politics lay down absolute principles, and would then have facts to accommodate themselves to these. This has been said of Rousseau—it might, with no less truth, be said of Montesquieu; for these two minds, so different, and often so contrary, had more than one feature in common. When

Montesquieu teaches that the principle of the democratical state is virtue, that of the monarchical honour, that of the despotic fear, much might at once be said on this statement on its own merits;\* but granting it to be correct and true, still it would be true only like the mathematical definition of a cube—that is to say, no practical consequence could be drawn from it. And yet such is the foundation on which Montesquieu's whole edifice rests; such is the foundation on which he pretends to demonstrate that the whole has necessarily rested, ever since social communities have had their existence.

Hence so many absolute judgments; hence that reasoning fatalism, which labours to show in all the events of a nation's life so many of the necessary consequences of its constitution, as if its constitution itself were not much rather the result of those events—as if the unforeseen did not play an immense part in all things human. “Given, the constitution of a people, to find its history; given, its history, to find its constitution.” Such, according to Montesquieu, are the two problems to the solution of which everything may be reduced. But as there is no people of which we do not know more or less, at the same time, of their constitution and their history, these two problems form only one; and the historian's task is confined to the disentangling of this accord, held to be constant, necessary, *fatal*, between events and laws.

This is what Montesquieu has done for all the nations with which he has had to occupy himself; it is what he has done for the Romans, in particular, whether we take up his *Considerations* on their history, or his *Spirit of Laws*. Rome, in its

\* We know that controversies arose, even during the author's lifetime, about the meaning of these three words, especially the first. He had not defined them, and obstinately refused to do so. Who can believe that he would not have done it, but from his being afraid that it might shake the whole edifice?



ascending period, not only was never conquered, but could not, and ought not to have been conquered; Rome, in its decline, passed through phases which its anterior condition had irrevocably determined. The great usurpations and great crimes that were perpetrated are not precisely excused; we have only the physician comforting himself over the most frightful accidents, by saying that he had clearly foreseen them. All, in fine, is regulated beforehand, if not by a blind fatality, at least by a necessity, resulting from the nation's primitive instincts, as well as from the laws which it had given itself in consequence of these. The principle of human liberty is saved, and that, indeed, of itself is something; but historical truth is at every instant sacrificed to the requisitions of theory. He who said so well—"Observations are the history of physical science, systems are its fable,"\* has himself oftener given us the fable of laws than their history.

It is with this system, accordingly, as with those which have been made for explaining, according to the conformation of the brain, the instincts and the history of any individual. If you keep to generalities, there is truth in phrenology; if you enter into details, if you would by means of it explain all and prognosticate all, it is of no consequence your hitting here and there on the truth. It will not, it cannot be anything but quackery. Why? Because a thousand physical and moral circumstances may have modified the results of the form of the brain. Thousands and ten thousands of circumstances may have also modified the results, primitively probable, of a people's conformation.

\* *Pensées Diverses*. He is known to have projected in his youth a geological and physical history of the earth. What would the book have been? Montesquieu must have set about it quite otherwise than with the *Spirit of Laws*, or he would have made a poor work of it. Some strokes of genius—for it would have had these—would not so easily, in a scientific work, have got him excused for laying down principles *a priori*, and facts collected without examination, or adapted to the needs of hypotheses.

IV.—Few men have been so much praised as Montesquieu ; but there is a curious feature to be noticed in those eulogiums. It is the freedom each assumes, in regard to the *Spirit of Laws*, of praising not only what is there, but likewise what is not there, and often much more what is not there than what is there. What a wicked wit thought he could say of the Bible,—

“Hic liber est in quo quærit sua dogmata quisque,  
Invenit atque ibidem dogmata quisque sua,—

might be justly said of Montesquieu's book. Each man has sought, each man has *found*, his own doctrines in it ; each, abandoning what he could not praise—that is to say, often a large part of the book—has fallen back on what it suited him to see, or to suppose that he saw, in the rest of it. One of its admirers, Lacretelle,\* admits this frankly enough. Establishing, first of all, that Montesquieu—hampered by his position in society, and having no desire to sacrifice his repose—wished to be “the apostle, and not the martyr of the truth,” he explains the *Spirit of Laws* as if it were an enigma throughout, of which the age had to discover the meaning. “Not venturing to embrace the subject in the way of theory,” says he, “Montesquieu resolved to make a theory result from a vast review of historical facts. Hence that affectation of erudition, in which he has rather followed than obtained the glory of a solid erudition. But it is by this system that, after the manner of the ancients, he has contrived to philosophize with impunity ; to advance to an object which he does not show (the appreciation of laws by the felicity or the infelicity of nations) ; to direct all thoughts towards a kind of government, where he seems to see no more than a local phenomenon (the English constitution) ; to decry another, which he seems to consecrate (the monarchy of Louis XIV.) ; to affect hatred

\* The elder Lacretelle, in his *Portraits Littéraires*—(Literary Portraits.)

only for despotism, which all were ready to abandon to him; but to make despotism recognised wherever the democratical principle—the equality of citizens, secured by the impartial supremacy of the law—has been effaced. Apparently, he would protect whatever exists; but, in reality, he subjects all to the rights of mankind. Unable openly to reveal truths, he makes them palpable. You learn to ponder what he says, in order to arrive at what he wants you to comprehend." Let us say, rather, what people want to comprehend.

But granting all this to be true, still it is a strange eulogium; and perhaps one might make a better one, for the author's glory, by admitting that he is often feeble, superficial, and incorrect, than to represent him as always powerful, always profound, after this fashion. As for these alleged appeals to the "rights of mankind," we shall see elsewhere what, in Montesquieu, democracy is, and whether he has made it anything but the most complete of despotisms. You believe him to be in advance of his age, and you would fain believe yourselves to be along with him; but be on your guard, he is sometimes far behind. When capital laws have been made against duelling, he will tell you, for example,\* that perhaps it might have sufficed to deprive a warrior of his quality of warrior, *by depriving him of his hand*. Here is what is neither of the eighteenth century nor of the seventeenth. We have nothing more to do after this, than to punish blasphemers likewise in the member by which they have sinned—that is to say, by cutting out their tongues.

Lacretelle admits, moreover, that the author of the *Spirit of Laws* has largely sacrificed to the levity of the times. "Montesquieu," says he, "abridges his chapters where he ought to have more fully developed them, as if to make it be thought that he is chary of words, and that ideas, with him,

\* Book xxiv. ch. 24.

are only flashes of genius; he throws in chapters like epigrams; he lavishes forms, tones, and turns of expression when he jests with the fashions of his day; he presents you with sketches that you would say were borrowed from Voiture, Marivaux, . . ." &c. We have said no more.

V.—The *Spirit of Laws* is a continual succession of small facts and vast consequences, of assertions proved superabundantly and of assertions not proved enough, of results out of proportion to their causes, of questions exhausted down to their last details, and of questions on which hardly a word is said. In an invocation to the Muses which he had the odd idea of placing at the head of the second volume, and which Vernet made him withdraw, he said: "Cause that men learn and that I do not teach, that I may reflect and may appear to feel." This was to say candidly enough, not to the Muses, but to the readers, "Though you should find me shallow, be assured I am not the less profound. Although my erudition may appear superficial and incomplete, say that I wanted to avoid wearying you. When I shall have wit, and I hope to have it often, see in it only the intention of dissembling my genius." Thus his apologists have done, thus they still do. Are they not a little tired of it?

After all these subdivisions, you expect at least some general conclusion, some wide survey taken from above, of that immense plain over which the author has conducted you. There is none. The work does not come to a close. The last chapter is one of those at the head of which you read, *Continuation of the same subject*. This *same subject* is a dissertation on a point at once very special and very obscure, *the origin of the hereditary succession of fiefs*. We find in it genuine erudition; but the whole of this end has the look of a fragment to which the author attached a value proportioned

to the labour it had cost him,\* and placed it there not knowing where else to put it. One naturally asks, how he could avoid being sensible of the feeling of emptiness and weariness which such an ending would leave in the minds of his readers. But are there many who read on to the end? Among those who will doubtless be indignant at the frankness with which we have stated our impressions, more than one assuredly has never done so.

These observations and many others were made to Montesquieu; his friends and his foes were at one on a multitude of points. But, notwithstanding the modest assurances to be found in many a passage of the book, the author was one of the most eager to consider it as the finishing word of the new science, and the gospel of future legislations. He even refused to correct material palpable errors, which he was compelled to acknowledge; one would have said that he did not wish, by correcting himself on some points, to allow it to be thought that he might have erred on others. His principles had acquired, in his own eyes, mathematical evidence. Facts proved nothing against them, any more than an ill-drawn triangle could be supposed to invalidate the geometrical properties of the triangle.

Ever the *esprit*, ever the pride of the age. When facts did not square with ideas, it was the facts that were wrong. Mably, in one of his works, had predicted a long duration to the constitution of Sweden, and before the work had come from the press that constitution was no more. Mably did not alter a word. "The King of Sweden," said he, "may indeed alter his country; but he shall not make me alter my book." Ever the *siège* of Vertot.

It was only blockheads, therefore, according to Montesquieu, or people without principle, that could refuse to yield.

\* He assured his friends that his hair had grown white while working at it.

His *Defence of the Spirit of Laws* is a pamphlet written in the taste of Voltaire. Hence Voltaire praised it highly. "The three fingers that wrote the *Spirit of Laws* condescended so far as to crush, by dint of reason and of epigrammatic strokes, the convulsionary wasp that was buzzing about his ears."\* In fact, in his inveterate habit of eluding difficulties, he had thought good to reply only to obscure adversaries whose exaggerations gave ample scope for his light sarcastic vein. He does not refute; he banters his assailants. In like manner, where he had good reasons to give, he still continues his raillery, and, in a word, he has never answered the objections started by his book. People think they concede a great deal when they confess that he sacrificed to the levity of the age. No, he made no *sacrifice*. He only followed his own natural humour, and what you find borrowed in his case, is much rather his seriousness. Whatever he may write, you find always the author of the *Persian Letters*, always the man of the eighteenth century, always the friend of Voltaire—for such he is—hardly concealing a little beneath his magisterial robes what he thinks of his age and his master.

\* Let us not forget—a fresh specimen of the sincerity he showed in all this affair—that these lines occur in the preface to the remarks in which Voltaire treats Montesquieu more severely than anybody.

## CHAPTER XI.

I.—Rousseau's opinion of contemporary historians—What was wanting in that age in order to have good ones.

II.—Voltaire thought himself purely philosophical in history—*The Essay on Manners—The Age of Louis XIV.*—That title promised much—The author repeats it and comments upon it—Has he given what he promised?—Blanks and defects now acknowledged by everybody—Contemporary opinions—Grimm—Toil and pains had little success with Voltaire—He was never truly superior but in what he did well off-hand—Little or no progress with him in talent, in philosophy, or in genuine maturity.

III.—Voltaire and historical criticism—No principles—The task of the historian, which had become more difficult in appearance, was rather facilitated in reality.

THE philosophy of history, then, had not yet appeared. People thought they looked down from an elevation, and yet they surveyed events and ideas only from the level of the systems, the interests, and the resentments of the day.

One understands how amid books thus conceived, Rousseau could have said, in his *Emile*, "The worst historians, for a young man, are those that judge." It is true that, as is usual with him, he immediately goes too far. "The facts," he adds, "the facts! and let the youth judge for himself. If guided incessantly by the author's judgment, he only looks at things with another's eye, and when that eye is wanting, he can no longer see anything." A mistake. The best method, on the contrary, of habituating himself to abstain from judging, is to make him read historians that do not judge; if he has read some that judge, he can no longer read without judging. The difficulty lies in not having those that judge soundly and philosophically, in the proper meaning of the word.

We cannot, therefore, blame the writers of the eighteenth century for having wished to pass judgment on facts, that is, in point of fact, for having been historians and not simple chroniclers. It was a happy and a necessary revolution that had to be effected in history. But, like all revolutions, it was ill executed. Too many things were wanting to admit of its being effected wisely and only with happy results.

The true historian loves the times that he describes. Not that we mean by this, that he sees all things bright; but he likes it, he lives in it, he becomes the cotemporary of the men whom he places on the scene, he makes himself their fellow-citizen.

Now, the eighteenth century had too high an idea of itself to act in this wise with regard to any age whatsoever. You may see it, indeed, crying up the virtues of such or such an ancient epoch; but only after having reconstructed it after its own manner, and with an eye to the polemics of the day. Sparta and Rome have become watchwords; be assured that among the many who use them as such, there are neither Spartans nor Romans. All countries and all times that cannot be turned in like manner to account are made objects of pity. A king of Siam, we are told, or of Pegu, who was informed by an ambassador that the Venetians had no king, burst into a fit of interminable laughter; he could not have laughed more on hearing that they had no noses or no ears. Voltaire's laughter is always a little of the same kind. The crotchet, so common to the inhabitants of capital cities, of seeing everything under their own point of view, of despising all that is not themselves, was carried into history. Not a man in that whole school fell in love with the national chronicles. "You say," wrote Voltaire in 1764, "that what the English know best is the history of England; I add, that what the French know least is the history of France." He



spoke the truth ; but how was he to set about teaching it to them ? It had been better to have been altogether unacquainted with it, as under Louis XIV., than to know it only by halves, so as, with Voltaire, to see nothing but acts of folly and childishness. One would have blushed to seem to initiate one's-self in the life of the olden time ; one felt a conscious pride in having nothing but sarcasms to bestow on the faith, the manners, and the labours of the Middle Ages. People began, indeed, to study them a little, in order, as it was said, that some light might be thrown on their darkness, and to clear the surface of that wild wilderness ; but that that wilderness could have its poetry, its lessons, its grandeur, was what nobody conceived, and still more, what nobody would have dared to have the appearance of perceiving. Ever the same mistake. Philosophy was wanting at that very point precisely at which it was supposed to have been carried the farthest.

II.—In short, it was with perfect sincerity that people thought they looked down from above, because it was their intention to do so.

Voltaire, generally modest in speaking of his works, is fond of repeating the obligations under which history lies to him.

"Here," we find him say in his *Essay on Manners*, "I consider the lot of men rather than the revolutions of the throne. It is to mankind that attention ought most to have been paid in history ; there it is that every writer ought to have said, *Homo sum.*"

The rule is excellent. But it is not only with regard to his readers that the historian ought to be *man* ; it is also with regard to those on whom he passes judgment, and the latter should not be immolated to the former.

This is what Voltaire has forgotten, and nowhere has he

more thoroughly forgotten it than in the very book where the rule is so well laid down. "What is wanting in this work," says M. Villemain, "is the very thing which he promised, philosophy, that is to say, the impartial judging of all epochs."

His *Age of Louis XIV.*, which was hardly less deficient in it, though in a different manner, had no less lofty pretensions.

The very title was a promise, and a great promise. We have become accustomed to titles of this sort, and the expressions, to *judge an age*, to *write the history of an age*, have become common. But at that time it was a novelty; there was, in those single words, the *programme* of a new world in history, and although people may not have understood it, the author had been sufficiently proud of it. "It is thought necessary to say to those who may read this work, that they should remember that it is no mere narrative of campaigns, but rather a history of men's manners. Enough of books are full of all the petty details of war, and of those details of human fury and misery. My design, in this attempt, is to portray the leading characters of those revolutions, and to throw aside the multitude of small facts that the more considerable may be better seen, together, if possible, with the spirit that conducted them."\* "I wish to portray," he says again, in a letter to Lord Harvey, "the last century, and not merely a prince. I am tired of histories in which we find nothing but the good and ill fortunes of a king, as if he alone existed, or as if nothing existed except with relation to him. In one word, it is the history of a great age still more than of a great king that I write."

No words could better express what the critics are at the present day unanimous in blaming him for not having done. To give a good idea of that book, one would need almost to take the reverse of what the author has said. His *Age of*

\* Ch. xl.

*Louis XIV.* is, above all else, the history of Louis XIV. His eyes are never taken off the throne ; he sees not, he does not make us see, the nation, except in the king, or, at most, around the king. He says he would not have a historian find pleasure in the narratives of campaigns, yet into these he launches with the most intense delight, without even expressing, we have seen, any serious reprobation of the ambition which caused so much bloodshed. He would have large and comprehensive views, yet he treats separately all subjects, war, the finances, ecclesiastical affairs, &c. Just as Montesquieu has left off with a treatise on fiefs, he finishes with the quarrel between the Dominicans and the Jesuits on the subject of the Chinese ceremonies. He promises to leave out small facts, yet he omits none. He is even incapable of distinguishing between those that have some historical importance and those that are merely curious. Wretched trifles have a place in the body of the history, and the *coup d'état* of Louis XIV. walking in at a meeting of his Parliament, quite a youth, and in his hunting dress and boots, is thrust aside among the anecdotes.

Many of these defects were not such in the eyes of his contemporaries, accustomed as they were to so many books that were still less philosophical ; but we learn from the testimony of Grimm, that even at that time people were not deceived as to the general feebleness of the work. "Notwithstanding the enthusiasm which M. de Voltaire's brilliant colouring is always sure to call forth," he writes in 1753, "people cannot shut their eyes to the fact that the author has not accomplished his object, or done justice to the title he has bestowed upon his book. Even in admitting the excellence of M. de Voltaire's plan, one must allow that the first part is a mere abridgment of the history of Louis XIV.'s reign, not that of his age, and that the second volume, which is the most im-

portant, seems to have been composed in haste, and without much care, and presents but a very slight sketch of the genius of that age."

Such was the language employed—in strict privacy, be it understood, for men were not to be deprived of the right to call those of Voltaire's adversaries blockheads, or jealous persons, who ventured to say as much of it openly. But we know, on the other hand, that that second part, which was thought, with reason, to be the feeblest, because it ought to have been the strongest part, was by no means composed, as Grimm seems to have believed, in haste and without care. Voltaire's correspondence leads us to believe that he had not spared time upon it, and that he had given it all the interest and all the care of which he was capable. We are compelled to conclude that we have there the very highest exercise of his powers.

Toil and pains, we would observe, did not in general succeed with him. He could, indeed, in re-touching a work, expunge some blemishes, add some strokes, and these, perhaps, among the happiest; but radically to improve it, to give it solidity and depth, was beyond his power—it was beyond his very nature. Shallow and feverish, his re-touchings ended only in blinding him to the serious defects of the work. He retrenched little, added much, and always so as to add to the force of what a calmer examination would have led him to see was already too strong. Thus it was that he has added to the *Age of Louis XIV.* so many things that jar with the gravity of the work, and that the *Essay on Manners*, on which he laboured almost half his lifetime, has been lengthened out with so many passionate repetitions, so many passages unworthy of a serious work. He has been really and incontestably superior only in those departments where genius exhibits itself in sudden flashes, and where perfection is reached all at once.

His life, viewed as a whole, would suggest to us, in this point of view, the same observation as his works. With him there was no progress. This, in some respects, is a recommendation. It is a fine thing, even were no farther improvement to be made, to start with such works as his *Œdipe* and his *Henriade*. But we speak of that more deep-seated progress for which one is indebted to meditation and age, and the course of which is not necessarily interrupted by the diminution, or even by the absence of talent. If a man grows old without knowing anything of this inward progress, we are compelled to censure, or, at least, to pity him. Now, Voltaire, at the age of five-and-twenty, had all the philosophy, all the loves, all the enmities, all the good qualities, and all the vices he ever had. No variation, in one sense, could be perceived in that long life. When any of his earlier works is attacked as shallow or immoral, no one dreams of objecting, in excuse for the author, that it was the work of his youth. Why so? Because it is so well known that, in that respect, his youth lasted as long as his life. He was, from the very first, all that he was ever to be; he never changed, either essentially or even, with the exception of some slight shades, in his outward deportment. Youth never had seen him more generous or more cynical, nor was his riper age more reserved, or his old age more serious. That grand effort of human freedom by which every one modifies and re-fashions himself according to his reason or his humours, was never known to Voltaire. One would say that he, on the contrary, devoted all his powers to keep himself one and immutable. But, in order to that, in reality he had nothing to do. Never had he any doubt, never any inward conflict. One feels that he had not even the least notion of those fluctuations of a soul which passes from passionate attachment to disgust, from agitation to tranquillity, from fervour to feebleness. Never will you

detect him either happy to have felt himself better, or sad for having felt himself worse. He pursues his course ; he thinks himself well to be as he is. Is he not the man of the age ? He would lose equally by being either better or worse. He believes himself, accordingly, to be as well as can be in all things, and will not be such a fool as to change.

III.—In history, accordingly, as elsewhere in all the parts of his work, Voltaire excelled really only in demolition. There was, no doubt, something to demolish in history, and we should have been well pleased had Montesquieu been less credulous ; but Voltaire, even where you approve his attacks on traditions too lightly admitted, still offends you by his haughty tone, by his want of learning ; and if he rejects a fact, it is always less, one would say, because it is or appears to him untrue, than because he does not like it. Thus, in his *Fragments on History*, he cleverly exposes fables admitted by Rollin ; but after that, look not for discussions, properly so called, or for principles laid down, or if he seems to lay down any, it is only to fall back immediately into petty details, petty refutations, and petty sneers. If he attempts to rise a little in good earnest, he immediately reaches the utmost limits of his learning, and admits that he does so with a curious candour. In many of his historical problems, the last thing he has to say, and his grand argument is, that nations are silly fools. Has he to speak of the establishment of the Carolingian race, and of the sanction given to it by the court of Rome ?—"One clearly sees, from this incident, what was the law of the Franks, and in what stupidity the peoples were sunk."\* Is it the establishment of feudalism, and is it asked how that state of things could have found a footing ?—"I know no other answer," says he, "but this, that most

\* *History of the Parliament of Paris.*

#### VOLTAIRE AND HIS TIMES.

are weak fools."\* Alas! too true; but they are never in any given case, without causes which the philosopher and ought to search out and examine.

Montesquieu and Voltaire, in a word, made the task of the historian too easy. All men of any talent could acquire that shallow depth, that philosophy of epigrams which the common herd of readers admired in their writings. *Philosophical* histories went on multiplying from day to day, and were, after all, mere histories, only without their simplicity. "Everything is *esprit* in France since Montesquieu has consecrated the word," wrote Grimm in 1767. "M. Anquetil calls his history *L'esprit de la Ligue*, because he undertakes to develop the secret causes and springs that were in action during those wretched times; but, in fact, it was in order to draw attention to his work by means of a fashionable title." Possibly so; yet who knows but the author might be sincere? *L'esprit de la Ligue*, except in point of talent, better answers to its title than does the *Siècle de Louis XIV.*, and we have seen that there might be more than one controversy to wage about that of the *Esprit des Lois*.

\* *History of the Parliament of Paris.*

## CHAPTER XII.

- I.—The drama—Errors already old—Was Corneille really Roman?—Fénelon's opinion—What Rome and the Romans are in Corneille—Was Racine Greek?—Is he Hebrew in *Athalie*?—Christian choruses—How to distinguish what is and what is not antique.
- II.—Historical truth in the drama—The point of departure from it—Did Voltaire, who called for it, attain it?—*Zaire*—The *Orphelin de la Chine*—The *Scythes*.—III.—Invasion of Philosophism—*Mahomet*—*Alzire*—*Titus*—*Spartacus*—*Guillaume Tell*—False sentiment everywhere.
- IV.—Inferiority of comedy in the eighteenth century—Causes—Comedy essentially requires true sentiment—Wit not enough for success in it—Voltaire has failed in it—What his comedies are—He unwittingly condemns himself.—V.—False theory—Art and nature—The drama and human life—The *Marchale* de Noailles—Marcel the dancing-master.—VI.—Tragedy admits what is comic better than comedy admits what is serious—Dangers and ridiculous results of mixed comedy—Some contemporary opinions—Pedantic comedies—*Nanine*—System of Beaumarchais—Molière's secret—Unknown to Voltaire—The author always behind the *dramatis personæ*—Satire and comedy are two different things—What *George Dandin* would be if treated in the manner of *Nanine*.
- VII.—How it was that this laughing age liked to be made to weep—It is not true that all kinds of composition are good except the tiresome.

BUT it was not only in history, properly so called, that people were under these illusions. The drama had its share of them.

Here the error was of old standing; not identically the same, it is true, but very near being so, if we take into account the difference of times.

Corneille and Racine did not pique themselves on their philosophy; but the one thought himself Roman and the other Greek, and both were mistaken.



Corneille, we say, was not Roman. People cry out against this. What! shall we forget the *Qu'il mourût?* and the imprecations of Camillus? and Cornelia? and Sertorius? And that line, so often applied to the poet himself: *Rome n'est plus dans Rome; elle est toute où je suis!*

People have become too much accustomed, we reply, to think everything Roman that is forcible, grand—in short, above nature. “It appears to me,” says Fénelon,\* “that the Romans have often been made to speak in too stilted a style. I can see no proportion between the emphasis with which Augustus is made to speak in *Cinna*, and the modest simplicity in which he is described by Suetonius.”

And it is not Suetonius only, but all the Latin historians, not excepting Tacitus, the least simple of them all, whom we might adduce in evidence against the emphatic phraseology of our Romans of the drama. Tragedy is entitled to amplify. It even ought to amplify; but let it not imagine that the more it amplifies, the better it discharges its office. An Italian landscape has always some warm colours; but would it be deemed more true to nature, or more Italian, the more that warm colours were lavished upon it? Rome and the Romans are portrayed in Corneille as the Campagna of Rome has often been painted, when the artist thought he could not make the sky too red or the soil too adust.

We have further said, that Racine was not Greek. This is generally allowed to be the truth. With a fine relish for the beauties of Greece, he had not the genius of a Greek; it was with perfect honesty of intention that he produced as Greek, and as truly Greek, what was only admirably travestied.

Is he more Hebrew in *Athalie* than Greek in *Iphigénie* and in *Phèdre*? No. We might even show, that in the choruses,

\* Letter to the Academy.

where he thought himself most under Hebrew inspiration, he has given most scope to the modern and to the Christian element. From the first act, for example, after the splendid picture presented by the Sinai scene, what, under his pen, do we find that law become, which is promulgated with such terrible accompaniments?

"God to this happy people did ordain  
That they should love Him with eternal love."

Now this is the Gospel, it is not the Decalogue. The mistake proves that Racine loved God; let us not blame him for that. But he does not confine himself to saying *love* where the law said *fear*. The verses that follow have something effeminate in them, something hardly more worthy of Christ than of Moses.

—"Law charming! law Divine!  
To win our love and trust to this great God—  
What reasons and what gentleness combine!"

Here the madrigal has evidently come into play; and the Christian, who had taken the Hebrew's place, yields that place to Bérénice's singer. And when the poet says, a little farther on,—

"His laws He gives, He gives us even Himself,"—

we see the Christian again appear, but more in anachronism than ever with the subject and the epoch.

The more we should err were we at every turn to indulge in analyses of this kind, the better is it to know, in general, not to believe on mere etiquette, even when a work of first-rate excellence is before us.

A process which might be successfully employed in these delicate disputes, would be to see what, when translated into Greek, that would become which is given us for Greek; and what, when translated into Latin, that which is given us for Roman. More than one passage is quoted as antique, which

either absolutely refuses to put on that antique costume, or which would wear it only with a grimace. Often, even where the translation would be nowise ridiculous, one has only to see the idea in Greek to be sensible that it is not Greek, and in Latin, to be convinced that it never could have entered a Roman's head.

But the best of all processes is to have no need of any, and to come to feel instinctively what is, or what is not, in keeping with the genius of the people that are brought upon the scene.

II.—Voltaire was the first to preach in favour of historical truth, which had hitherto been banished from the drama.

But it is easier to point to the false than seriously to return to the true. It would have required a resolute study of antiquity, such as nobody then cared to enter upon; still more would it have required that that study should be undertaken in the spirit indicated above—that is to say, with an affection for old times, with the faculty of living in them with the heart and imagination; and this neither Voltaire, nor any other dramatic author of his epoch, possessed.

We see, accordingly, those of the second and the third rank plunging ever more and more, in spite of his preachings, into that falsehood of representation which they know not how to clothe, as Racine did, with sentiments ever true and with beauties ever fresh. Much criticism has been spent, in our days, on "Follow, ye guards, the queen!"\* What shall we say of the *Regulus* of Dorat, in which we find a *confidante* exclaim—

"What! without escort! you, a Roman lady?"

And this *lady* whom the *confidante* is astonished to meet unattended by her footman, is the wife of Regulus, of that

\* *Iphigénie*, Act iv.

Regulus who had asked, we know, to be allowed to return to Italy, there to till his little farm, seeing his only slave had run off. That same Regulus who looked on captivity as disgraceful, who desired that no Roman prisoner should ever be ransomed—would you know what Dorat makes him say?

“These chains my glory make, and render it more pure.”

And this was what one might still write without being too much laughed at in 1765!

Was Voltaire, who had given the precepts, much better himself in point of practice? He thought he was; he boasted of being so with the same sincerity which we have had to own he possessed, on this point, in his historical works.

“The idea has occurred to me,” he writes in a letter on *Zaire*, “to bring into contrast, in the same picture, the manners of the Mahometans and those of the Christians, the court of a Sultan and that of a King of France.”

Should we ever have suspected this? There are many things to be admired in *Zaire*, but as for this, the idea would never occur to us of looking for it there. Let us do our best, on the contrary, to forget what the author has said of it, for instead of enjoying the beauties of his tragedy, we should have to reply that the personages he introduces are, with the exception of their names, neither Mussulmans nor Christians, neither a Sultan’s court nor that of a King of France in the twelfth century. Racine, too, assures us, in speaking of his *Britannicus*, that he is to put before us the Romans of the empire, the court of a Roman emperor. Were we not very careful to forget this promise, could we admire *Britannicus*?

But Voltaire, if we are to believe him, had sketched contrasts far more difficult to handle than those which he announces in *Zaire*.

He tells us, in the preface to the *Orphelin de la Chine*, that

he is about to present us with that between the Tartars and the Chinese. So sure was he of his success in this matter, that in a letter to Dumarsais,\* he says, "Were the French not so very French, my Chinese would have been more Chinese, and Gengis still more a Tartar. But I had to impoverish my ideas, and to hamper myself in the costume, in order to avoid shocking a frivolous nation, which laughs sillily, and thinks it should laugh heartily at all that is not in keeping with its own manners, or rather with its own fashions." Thus he was afraid of being too Chinese or too Tartar. Was he not rather afraid of being charged with not being Chinese or Tartar enough?

In the preface to the *Scythes*, we have the same promise. "One ventures at the present day on the contrast presented by the ancient Scythians and the ancient Persians." But how did he become acquainted with them? And has he at least faithfully given us the little that we do know of their manners? One would not say, looking at the piece, that he had troubled himself in the least about it. He does as those painters of old used to do, who began by designing certain personages from their own imaginations, and afterwards put a name above the head or under the feet.

See, since we have come to speak of painters, how good ones set about their work; those, I mean, who hold to being truthful, always and everywhere truthful. It is not enough that they have for twenty years been drawing men, animals, and trees; they will never attempt a man, never a beast, never a tree, without having one before their eyes, at least without making use of a sketch after nature. Well then! so also ought it to be in history and in the drama. No skill, nay, not even genius itself, can compensate for the want of study, and too often they have been employed, with honest intention, only in dissembling the absence of it.

\* October 1755.

III.—We find the same self-deception in Voltaire, with respect to the various moral aims which he had proposed to himself, and which one would as little guess his having often intended, had he not taken care to speak of them.

In *Mahomet*, for example, he had meant to paint fanaticism. He announces this with much ado; he had done this even in the title, for it originally ran thus: *Fanaticism, or Mahomet the Prophet*. But where do we find this pretended fanaticism? In the hero of the piece? No. Mahomet admits that he does not believe a word of what he teaches others. In Seide, whom Mahomet orders to commit a murder in the name of God? But Seide hesitates, doubts, and trembles. He cannot yet conceive, says he,—

“How this divinity so good, and of mankind the sire,  
Should murder foul and horrible, of human hands require.”

Farther on :

“Me vainly what seemed duty's call to murder did provoke,  
Far otherwise humanity within my bosom spoke.” . . .

And there are thirty verses in this tone. Viewed dramatically, they are very fine, and we should be sorry to see them away; but this is not fanaticism. Shall we be told that Voltaire's object was not to portray a fanatic, but to show that religious enthusiasm is always false or factitious, that those who are called fanatics are either rogues who lead, or fools who allow themselves to be led? It is very likely that this was his leading idea; but in that case what becomes of historical truth and philosophical truth? Can it be maintained in history, is it probable in morals, that there never was any real, profound, sincere fanaticism? Are we quite sure that Mahomet himself was not convinced of his own inspiration, or at least of his having been called to a great work by God? The immense successes of his law and of his arms are not such as are obtained by elegantly calculating how

"A new religion must be feign'd, new fetters men receive,  
And a new God must be proclaim'd the blind world to deceive."

Yet another example. In the preface to *Alzire*: "I have attempted," says he, "in this tragedy, which is quite original, and of a kind sufficiently new, to make it appear how superior the true spirit of religion is to the virtues of nature."

What, in the view of Voltaire, was this "true spirit of religion?" Assuredly it was not Christianity. One does not very well at once see in what the superiority of this spirit to "the virtues of nature" could consist, inasmuch as, according to the author's ideas, that very spirit belongs to the religion of nature.

What, accordingly, do we find in the play? Down to the last scene, in which Guzman, when dying, reforms and forgives, the whole interest, on the contrary, is concentrated on the *virtues of nature*, on the courage and heroism of the oppressed Peruvians. Guzman himself, in forgiving, does not really travel beyond this category of the virtues. Christianity commands the forgiveness of injuries; but the forgiveness of injuries was known before Christianity. Guzman might be a pagan, and yet forgive.

These, it will be seen, are not literary criticisms; and even, literally speaking, they should not be reckoned criticisms at all. Voltaire, a dramatic author, was entitled to make Mahomet a rogue; as a dramatic author he could not, and should not have debarred himself from representing Seide as hesitating, struggling, distracted; no more could he, or should he have, in *Alzire*, refrained from making the Peruvians appear to the best advantage. What we have wished to prove was, that, as a philosopher, he was mistaken in the bearing which he had designed for those plays; that, above all, the mistake was not confined to him, but had its root in the spirit and tendency of the times. It had become no

longer allowable for an author to relate for the mere purpose of relating, to paint for the mere purpose of painting, to cause emotion for mere emotion's sake. Every occurrence, whether exhibited in a book, or employed on the stage, had necessarily to be enlisted in the service of one of the favourite ideas of the day.\* It was all over with *Mahomet*, if the moral concealed in it were not that Christianity might not, like Mahometanism, have been established by a cheat; all over with *Alzire*, if it did not tend to show that whatever was good in Christianity, was neither more nor less than whatever of natural religion was still to be found in it;† all over with *Titus*,‡ if the hero were not a good man, after the fashion of the eighteenth century, and if he did not speak in encyclopædical phraseology; all over with *Spartacus*,§ if the rude revolted slave were not to be a grandiloquent sage, a sort of liberal chevalier, and, as we should say in our modern jargon, *humanitary*; all over with *Guillaume Tell*,¶ if the hero of Swiss independence did not confound the word independence with liberty, and did not give the latter word its revolutionary meaning; all over, in short, with every man that did not bring his own stone to the new edifice, or, better still, did not contribute a blow of the pick-axe to the work of demolishing the old one. If history refused to lend itself to this, not only had means to be contrived for compelling it to do so, but the author himself came to persuade himself that he had done no

\* "The muse herself of Sophocles, in robe of doctor dress'd,  
Upon a bloody scaffolding morality profess'd."

GILBERT.

† "Alzire, though plunged in deep despair, for reasoning finds vent,  
And even when he calls on death, on Phædo doth comment."

GILBERT.

‡ By Dubelloy, 1760.

§ By Saurin, 1760.

¶ By Lemierre, 1766. In the prologue to Florian's *Guillaume Tell*, the Swiss herdsman is represented as founding, amid the mountains, "a retreat to those two daughters of heaven, consolars of the earth, to virtue, to reason."



more than give history her true meaning and her legitimate bearing. The age seemed condemned to move away from truth by the very efforts it made to get near it.

IV.—And here, it strikes us, we must look for the explanation of a fact which has created much surprise, the inferiority, namely, of comedy in an age when there was so much wit.

How are we to account for this failure? After all that has been said, a very short answer may suffice. People were ever in pursuit of what was false in sentiment, and comedy essentially requires what is true.

Tragedy, in fact, can best dispense with truth. It takes us out of our ordinary sphere; it raises us too much above the level of our every-day sentiments, to make it easy for us to follow it, to test it, step by step, by our own experience. Comedy, instead of elevating us to a higher level of its own, comes down to ours. It has no other sphere than ours. In comedy we are, in some sort, at home; we retain our own experience, our own ideas, our own feelings. It speaks in our own tongue, and, like the green-grocer at Athens, we don't like to have it spoiled for us. Now something more than mere wit is required in order to learn how to speak a language well.

Hence it is that wit does not suffice for the composition of a good comedy. Let us say, rather, from the moment that wit predominates, it becomes a positive hindrance to success. Comedy requires a profound study of the caprices of the human heart, and wit stops at the surface, where a single glance suffices for its entertainment for better or worse. Comedy wants cheerfulness, wit has nothing but sarcasm. Comedy wants good humour, wit has none. Comedy, notwithstanding the lightness of her outward garb, requires to be written seriously, and wit would think it beneath her if

she did not treat comedy with raillery and jests. Grimm goes too far when he says, that "comic poets have been, for the most part, melancholy and serious people;" but he is right when he adds, "M. de Voltaire is too gay, and gay comedy is the only kind of writing in which he has not succeeded. The reason is, that he who laughs and he who causes laughter are two very different persons."

Thus it was that Voltaire, with more wit than Molière, fell so far short of him. He laughs, but does not make others laugh; I mean with that hearty honest laugh, without which there can be no true success in comedy. He laughs, but one would say that he wants only to divert himself; one is almost tempted to take offence at his railleries, and to side with those whom he means to hit.

His comedies, accordingly, advance lamely enough. There is no due proportion kept, no sequence, and, in the same degree, no sustained interest. You jump from the serious to the burlesque, and look in vain for true comedy. You find scenes that are cold, nay, even pedantic, well powdered with epigrams. In short, Voltaire can hardly be said to equal J. B. Rousseau, who was also a great epigrammatist, but who only composed comedies without gaiety, without freshness of fancy, I had almost said without wit, for wit when out of place is no longer wit. Epigram itself must not be thought to succeed all the better the more witty and sarcastic a man is. Voltaire has made good epigrams, but they are few, and much fewer, at all events, than were expected from him. Not that we would say, with M. de Maistre, that "if he could not make them, it was because the smallest mouthful of his gall could not cover less than a hundred verses." We do say that, as in the case of comedy, he was wanting in that happy equilibrium without which one is sometimes all the less witty the more wit he has and believes himself to have.

He has passed sentence on himself, unwittingly, in an article of his *Philosophical Dictionary*. "A man," says he, "who had some knowledge of the human heart, was consulted about a tragedy which was about to be brought upon the stage. He replied, that there was so much wit in the piece that he was doubtful of its success. 'What!' it was said, 'do you consider that a defect, at a time when everybody is calling for wit, when authors write only to show that they have it, and when the public applauds even the falsest sentiments when they are brilliant?' Ay, no doubt; they will applaud the first day, and will feel uninterested the second."

Well, then, this is just what happened; it is what will always happen to the comedies of Voltaire. Had he not been judge and party both, he would certainly have perceived that what he said there so well of the tragic drama, was still more true of the other.

V.—But to this unhappy superabundance of wit, in him there was added a false theory, perhaps an after-thought, although it too was honestly held, in justification of the faults which he had found it impossible altogether to dissemble.

"If comedy," he says, in the preface to his *Enfant Prodigue*, "ought to be the representation of manners, this piece seems sufficiently to possess that character. It presents a medley of seriousness and pleasantry, of the comic and the sentimental. Thus it is that the life of man is chequered."

Possibly so; but what is certain is, that a motley comedy cannot have any true success, witness the very one of which its author speaks so complacently. Just as in visible nature there are contrasts which we should blame in a picture, and which no good painter would ever think of transferring to his canvas, there are things in life by which we regulate our actions, but which we could never tolerate in the domain of

art. This is what the Abbé Batteux established with much justness in 1747, in his *Principles of Literature*. M. de Schlegel has even made the remark,\* that comedy risks the loss of its moral aim when it takes up two passions at once, even though both may be comic. "It is thus," says he, "that a miser and an old gallant may see Molière's *Avare* (Miser), and go away perfectly well pleased. The one will say, 'At least, I am no dotard;' and the other, 'At least, I am not a miser.' In short, were we not afraid of using too trite an expression, we would say, that art ought not to chase two hares at once."

In support of what he lays down, Voltaire quotes an example, and a very curious one, of the odd medley the world sometimes presents. He tells how the *Maréchale* de Noailles being one day at the bedside of one of her daughters who was dangerously ill, exclaimed, amid her tears, "My God! restore her to me, and take my other children!" "Do you include sons-in-law?" murmured the Duke de la Vallière, who was one of them; on which the mother burst into a fit of laughter, all the bystanders did the same, and the dying daughter herself laughed more than any of them.

All very well; but try to transfer this to the stage and you will have only what is odious and revolting, even to the very lowest of the public. Voltaire, in spite of his system, would be the very first to show his indignation. Were you yourself a man who could indulge in a jest at the bedside of the dying, still you would not allow such jests to be perpetrated on the stage.

Nay, more. It may so happen that a truly amusing incident that would have set everybody laughing, may not be acceptable on the stage, and may be thought unendurable there.

Marcel, the famous dancing-master, he who used to say with such genuine sincerity, "Ah! how much there is in a

\* *Course of Dramatic Literature.*

minuet!" Marcel, in teaching a lady to stoop gracefully one day, threw his glove before her, in order that she might pick it up. This incident made the tour of Europe; people had laughed till they cried at the dancing-master's extravagance. Well, some years afterwards, an author of the name of Bret got hold of the story, and introduced it into his *Mariage par dépit*. What was the result? It was hissed and hooted. The same incident which had been laughed at when real, was denounced in a comedy as a shameful impertinence, as insulting to the ladies, as an anti-French calumny.

VI.—Strange to say, tragedy would accommodate itself rather better, or, if you will, less badly, to a certain intermingling of the comic, than comedy with a mixture of the serious. In general, a very marked contrast has less chance of displeasing than one that is vague and slight. There is much to be said, in theory, against our modern dramas, where the merry and the frightful come alternately into play; and yet this kind of composition is incontestably, on the whole, less apt to shock, less false, than the mixed comedies of Voltaire, Destouches, Diderot, de la Chaussée, and all that school. From scenes of pleasantry to scenes of blood the passage is more natural and more easy, on the stage, than from a comic speech to a piece of sentiment.

The dangers of mixed comedy had not, however, escaped the notice of all. Fréron smartly exposed them, on the appearance of every successive specimen of this hapless kind of writing. Sabatier, in his *Trois Siècles*, laughed at that limping Thalia which, he said, had one foot in a slipper and the other in a buskin. Gilbert did not spare it.\* Collé, in 1749, spoke

\* " Her sister's misadventures, too, the muse, Thalia, shares

Philosophy's apostle see, with tearful eye, look sad,

of it with much good sense: "The lachrymose comic style of the *Glorieux*, of the *Philosophe Marié*, of the *Enfant Prodigue*, and that of all the pieces of La Chaussée, will never be relished," said he,\* "by the lovers of good comedy. Let people, if they please, invent a new kind of tragedy, or heroic comedy, as one would call it; it will ever be a branch of tragedy. Let the *dramatis personæ*, in this middle tragedy, be neither princes nor great lords. . . . I admit this kind of composition,† or such another kind, provided this tragedy or comedy uniformly support its character. . . . It appears to me that there is no middle; I want to laugh without crying, or to cry without laughing."

All the more clearly is there a departure from true comedy in those plays which make you neither laugh nor cry, frigid lessons thrown into the form of dialogues, satires, often just at bottom, but stilted and false in their forms. It is from a play as a whole that its moral ought to be gathered. It should not be reproduced in every scene, in every passage, in every verse, any more than a man who would recommend virtue, should make his whole talk a perpetual sermon. Even a sermon, if you would not have it tiresome, ought not to aim at giving a lesson in every phrase.

But the eighteenth century, from its very nature, was much addicted to sermonizing. Wherever it took it into its head to introduce a moral, there it thought it could never have

"She shuns the gaiety which she should ever follow close,  
 Disfigured with a tragic mask, no charms her figure shows.  
 At times a tale is cut and carved by some sad rhyming fool,  
 Who calls it then a comedy, although it scorns all rule;  
 Buffoonery and sentiment by turns your patience try—  
 And first a farce, a sermon then, all sense and taste defy.  
 At times" . . . &c.

\* *Journal Historique*.

† Voltaire did not admit it. "What would it be but an intrigue among vulgar people? This would be to destroy the dignity of the buskin." Here we see somewhat of the *grand seigneur*. But the other extreme has elevated the floor too much.

enough. Far from certain as to the quality, it made its stand on the quantity. Then this was by far the easiest kind of writing, which, whether one admitted its being so to himself or not, was a great reason in its favour, at an epoch when talent was so rare. Such a man had failed in the two principal kinds of dramatic composition, but easily got himself a reputation by mingling them together.

In the comedies which at that time were so unhappily in fashion, we do not find, as in Molière, follies and vices contrasted with each other, and correcting each other; it is all reason and virtue, ever serious, ever armed at all points, which make a regular stand in front of what the play is meant to correct. Footmen become Catos, chambermaids Lucretias; the lovers are all Grandisons and Clarissas; and comedy becomes a romance—that is, a bad romance, for it cannot be a good one. The *Méchant* of Gresset, a play greatly superior to those of La Chaussée and Destouches, would fall within these remarks, however little we should like to analyse it in the light of the *Misanthrope*.

Among the plays in which Voltaire has meant to convey a moral, let us look at the best, *Nanine*. Could the complete development of a moral, suffice to make a comedy, *Nanine* is the most perfect that exists. What is its object? To combat aristocratical prejudices, to show that in this world the real differences are those of education, of merit, of virtue, and that all the rest are nothing. But the more this position in itself is excellent, the less need for introducing it at every turn; it should have been put into action, not into a sermon. The noble count ends well by marrying Nanine. Here is an action, if you will; but how many discourses have we first—and such discourses! How much preparation and how much pedantry! How do objections seem to be started for the sole purpose of having them refuted!

Never, in the drama, should the author be perceived behind the personages in the play. When Beaumarchais was asked why, in his *Mariage de Figaro*, he had allowed certain negligent phrases to remain, which were not, it was added, in his style—"In my style!" said he. "If, unhappily, I had one, I should make an effort to forget it when I compose a comedy."

It is no misfortune to have one; nay, it is an indispensable condition, if a man would be anything in literature. But, with the exception of this sally, he was in the right. Nothing more insipid, according to him,\* than those mawkish plays, "where everything bespeaks the author, such as he is." "When my subject gets possession of me," he adds, "I call forth all my personages, and make them take their several places. Think of yourself, Figaro, thy master is about to guess you out. Quick and save yourself, Cherubino, it is the Count you are touching! Ah, Countess, what imprudence with so violent a husband! I know nothing as to what they shall say, it is what they are to do that occupies me. Next, when they have got plenty of life put into them, I write to their dictation."

Such was Molière's secret. Beaumarchais had been far from faithful to it; and it was even false to pretend to have written so naturally a play which is full of satirical allusions and actualities, and where certainly all, to use his own expression, *was the author*; but the theory is excellent, and it was something to have stated it so clearly.

In Voltaire, then, on the contrary, and to return to the same example in *Nanine*, one perceives nothing but the author, and the requisitions of his polemics. The reasonable characters are too evidently in the right, the others too grossly in the wrong. These last seem to be there for no other purpose than to run into the absurd things they do and utter; they

\* Preface to the *Mariage de Figaro*.



might be left to speak alone for their refutation to be complete, and the reasonable ones reason only to furnish the rest with occasions for talking nonsense. When the count has made his profession of faith, declaring that the honest man and the virtuous woman are in his eyes "the first of human beings," mark what the baroness says in reply :

"At least, one needs must be a gentleman.  
But a low scholar, an unknown honest knave,  
If only virtuous, would he get from you  
The honours that to noblemen belong?"

Where is there truth to nature here? Do people speak thus, or did they ever speak thus? Noblemen, one needs not say, have been found capable of acting upon these principles; but never will they be found to express them, or even to entertain them so crudely, or in such a form. It is irony, it is satire; it is not comedy, and the general tone is no better. A footman's jokes, and an old woman's vivacities, cannot induce us to give that title to a tissue of such scenes. *Nanine* and *L'Enfant Prodigue* are full of strokes borrowed from Boileau; but what the satirist said speaking in his own person, Voltaire puts into the mouths of people for the purpose of making them ridiculous. Farewell, henceforth, to the natural and the true.

A comedy! Would you like to see one? We shall not send you this time to the *Misanthrope*; we bid you go straight to *George Dandin*. The object of it is to point to the dangers incident to the union of persons of different conditions. What it proposes, then, is nearly the opposite of what is the aim of *Nanine*; but the subjects are of the same kind, and the one may be fitly compared with the other.

Suppose, then, this subject to be treated after the manner of *Nanine*. George Dandin is to be a generous fellow of the burgess class, who shall have trusted to his love and his wealth as a means of attaching to him his wife, a woman of

a noble, but poor family. Deceived in this, he reproaches his wife with what appears to him black ingratitude. His wife, the victim of her father's love of money, is to be made to deplore the fatal *yes* which she had to consent to say; but still, keeping up appearances, it is only by stealth that she is to let it be seen that she dislikes her husband and loves another. The father and mother, both becoming witnesses of the disorders of this domestic establishment, are reciprocally to accuse each other of having caused it. The men-servants are to reason on all these sad circumstances, and to preach in their own way the moral lessons they inculcate. Next, in order to justify the title—for it will have been announced as a comedy—some silly person must be introduced, commissioned to be comic for one and all. The play, accordingly, will of course, in some passages, be extremely affecting; and perhaps it will be expected, as in the case of the *Père de Famille*,\* that there be as many handkerchiefs as spectators;† but art will be indignant, and nature—who, it was thought, would be closely followed—will be found to have fled.

VII.—How comes it that that laughing generation should have been so fond of tears? Was virtue, indeed, so very dear to it, that it could applaud her even under forms that were ridiculous?

In this, let us be sure, there was one of those involuntary calculations, which often exercise more influence than a settled theory, or a true and sincere sentiment.

Few, then, were so infatuated as to be altogether blind to the extent to which all the old foundations of morals were shaken; few, very few, really had any faith in the new foundations laid by philosophy. Hence, among the great majority, there was a desire to have their minds set at ease, with respect

\* By Diderot, 1769.

† *Mémoires de Bachaumont*.

either to the part they might have taken in the subversion of the former, or to the solidity of the latter.

Now, they had but two ways of thus re-assuring themselves, one only of which was good—namely, to be virtuous. But this was difficult, and they had little taste for it. There remained the bad method,—that of allowing their feelings to be affected at spectacles of virtue; and as few of these occurred in actual life, they must needs go in search of them to the playhouse. A play, then, was all the better the more easily it caused those emotions, and elicited those tears, which were to reconcile people with themselves. “People talk of war. Our gallants greatly desire it, and our ladies are but moderately cast down at the thought. It is a long while since they have tasted the high seasoning of the terrors and the pleasures of a campaign; they want to see how much the absence of their lovers will afflict them.”\* At the theatre, also, people wanted to see whether, and how, they would find themselves affected.

Hence, further, the indulgent tone of the critics, however little they might belong to the new school. They could not blame a manner of writing which, by lulling people’s consciences, furthered the progress of their friends. Grimm approved of it.† “All kinds of composition are good,” said he, “except the tiresome.” Still it remained to be proved, as we see, whether the kind we have been criticizing did not tire, and this side of the question was not without its difficulty.

But let there be no dispute about tastes; let us advance a step higher. Is it true that all kinds of composition are good, provided only they be not tiresome? Is this what Boileau means to say? Never, any more in literature than in morals, does the end justify the means. If an age, palled with dissipation, allows you to tickle it into laughter, or to melt it

\* *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aissé*. 1741.

† *Correspondence*. 1754.

into tears, by compositions which both art and nature disavow, so much the worse both for it and you. A vogue of this sort will never give a title to respect in the eyes of the friends of true sentiment; and, besides, how long would it last? In the very lifetime of Voltaire, his comedies kept their ground only through the influence of his name. Who, at the present day, would think of restoring them to the stage? Who would look to them for the rules of composition? The King of Prussia, in whom we have occasionally seen, already, more sound sense and good taste than we could find among his good friends in France, wrote to him on the first appearance of *Nanine*: "This sort of writing has never pleased me. . . . My zeal for good comedy goes so far, that I would rather be made the butt of its ridicule than give my suffrage to this misshapen and stupid bastard, to which the taste of this age has given birth."

## CHAPTER XIII.

- I.—Trammels imposed on tragedy—Theatrical horrors and real horrors—Silly terrors—The *Atrée* of Crebillon—What our present dramaturges would be at this rate—Easy to shoot beyond the mark, but hard to hit it—Mawkish grief and silly gaiety—The *Epistle on Consumption*.
- II.—The English drama in the eighteenth century—A representation of *Hamlet*—Voltaire wanted a reform in France, but durst not seriously attempt it—He thought himself far more terrible as a dramatist than he really was.
- III.—Shakspeare: Voltaire's changes of opinion with regard to him—To what extent foreign literatures were little known in France—English—German—Contempt felt by the King of Prussia for his own tongue—Shakspeare brought to the bar of the Academy—Judgment delayed—Some of the French are taken with the English drama—Voltaire resumes the subject—"Shakspeare or Racine must, one or other, bite the dust"—The battle—D'Alembert's letter to Voltaire—Infatuation.
- IV.—Voltaire missed the point in question—Small but just criticisms—Shakspeare has been praised excessively and ridiculously—Walpole—Letourneur—M. de Schlegel.
- V.—Voltaire had not seized the question in all its breadth—Racine and Shakspeare—To whom did the future belong?—Voltaire's timidity—*Tancrède*—Dangers real, and become evident—Superabundance of action—Surcharge of local colouring.

BUT whilst comedy was authorized to draw from what sources it pleased, at the risk of presenting nothing at last but an incoherent and mongrel medley, it was insisted, by way of compensation, that tragedy should never venture beyond historical sources and the realities of life.

On this last point, what a contrast between so many odious things which were still tolerated in the manners of the day, and that nicety of feeling with which, on the stage, everything was proscribed that went beyond a certain measure of

the horrible ! Judicial torture and punishments, of atrocious cruelty, still kept their ground ; they were seen in frightful abundance. "The Grève \* has not for some time been empty, and punishments of all sorts have succeeded each other without intermission." Thus spoke Bachaumont in 1768, and then peaceably resumed the thread of his historical tales. The prisons were dismal caverns, the hospitals perfectly abominable. Yet that nation, which lived on, utterly unconcerned, amid those hideous remains of ancient barbarism, possessed at the theatre the fine nerves of a duchess. People went to the Grève to look on while human beings were torn with red-hot pincers, broken on the wheel, and quartered ; yet every tragic hero who dared to perish otherwise on the stage than by the ancient method of poison, or the old poignard of the classics, was denounced as a bungler, a man unworthy to die in good society. This contradiction, we may remark, was itself inherited from the ancients. At the circus, blood flowed in streams in good earnest ; at the theatre, it was not allowed to flow even in a figure.†

One must go to the memoirs of the time to see how far, on this subject, the indignation of the good public of France could go. In Italy, it is said, at theatres frequented by the lower classes, guards must sometimes be employed to prevent the pit from rushing on the actor who represents a tyrant, a wretch. In France the actors run no risk of a beating ; still a grenadier, who happened once to be on duty in the play-house at a representation of *Britannicus*, levelled his piece at Narcissus.‡ But it was sometimes asked, with a great air of

\* The Grève is an open space in the centre of Paris where criminals used to be executed.—*Trans.*

† *Ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet.*—HORACE.

‡ The guards had their pieces always loaded with ball, and that none might be ignorant of this, they loaded them at the entrance to the theatre. An absolute Government had always some fear of what might be called a popular assemblage.

seriousness, whether the author of such or such a scene could fail to be a man of a black heart, and could miss having in his soul the germs at least of the atrocities which he painted. People could not comprehend the imagination plunging, with full intent, into a sea of crimes; there must necessarily be under all this, they said to themselves, criminal instincts or twitches of remorse. What was there not told in the ladies' *boudoirs*, of the mysterious misdeeds of that poor Abbé Prevost, who was simple enough to defend himself when thus attacked! Others, on the contrary, prided themselves in this indirect homage to their talents. Crebillon was fond of telling how, at the first representation of his *Atrée*, the hissing was as violent as the applause, seeing that everybody remained thunderstruck and left the place as if they had been witnessing an execution. But further, from the day following, this superstitious horror turned in part against Crebillon himself. People shuddered at the sight of a man who could give birth to such things, and, his enemies helping, he ran the risk of being marked as a person capable of seriously perpetrating, should the occasion offer, the horrors he had dared to introduce upon the stage. Mark that there was no question about atrocities of his own invention, and that he had only added to the Greek legend some details harmonizing with the spirit of the original.

Judging by this standard, it will be seen that the dramaturges of the present day are such monsters as the earth never produced the like of. It is well that they have thoroughly cured us of this childlike horror. They have given us too much to shudder at; people have made up their minds not to shudder at anything; and were the great actress, Dumesnil, to rise from the dead to act for us the part of *Mérope*, she would run small risk of hearing a young man cry out with a voice choked with sobs: "Don't kill him! He is your son!"

People can now bear seeing on the stage what would have revolted both the French on their return from the execution of Damiens, and the Romans on leaving the games of the Circus. People have made for themselves a literary soul, which has hardly anything in it of the real soul, and just as in 1789, as has been said, France outran liberty, one may now say that in the theatre she has outrun truth. "The great difficulty, the grand merit," said Laharpe very justly, "is to find the degree of emotion at which the heart loves to pause, and to excite pity or terror only at the point where the feeling is pleasurable. If in all the arts of the imagination we had only to think of going beyond our aim, nothing would be more common than good artists; but the grand affair is just to reach it, and this is what is so rare."

This tact was wanting in the eighteenth century. People always either fell short of the mark or overshot it, and this not only in the theatre, but everywhere. Society, like literature, presented an incoherent alliance between levity and dulness, between that forced laugh which grates upon the ear, and that pretentious horror which either does not affect one at all, or affects the senses only. When poesy, tired of silly laughter or of solemn reasoning, would analyse some more deeply-seated emotions, she knew not as yet the key to any of those stores of melancholy from which our age has sometimes drawn so eloquently. Gilbert in the hospital, and Chenier at the foot of the scaffold, were the only authors who succeeded in extracting some specimens of good alloy. Down to their time, grief was only mawkish or ridiculous; it owed its few moments of ascendancy only to the gross concurrence of the senses. The *Epistle on Consumption* \* proved a kind of public poisoning. It was said to have hastened the death

\* By Saint Peravi, 1766.



of a great many persons affected, or who thought themselves affected, with the disease which it portrayed.

II.—But while so much susceptibility was shown, in France, with respect to theatrical horrors, and so much callousness to those that were real, the contrary took place in England. There you saw no refinement of cruelty in punishments, no torture of the accused, and, at the same time, in the play-house, there were horrors in abundance. The French were astounded at it. Linguet, in his *Annales*,\* did his best to be indignant. "In England," said he, "executions are mere child's-play in comparison with ours; the tragedies are butcheries. . . . Hamlet is the quintessence of all the horrors that the frenzied brain of a lunatic could conceive. . . . The grave-diggers, in the fifth Act, dig an actual grave. They toss out on the stage a black earth, precisely of the colour and unctuousness of that found in graveyards. This earth is full of real bones, actual skulls, which the men lift with their shovels. . . . And all this is well received; and all present, men, women, girls, sailors, lawyers, merchants, lords, all, in short, are in an ecstasy." . . .

Voltaire had said good things, in theory, on the mean to be observed betwixt these two extremes. In dedicating his *Brutus* to Lord Bolingbroke: "If the English," he wrote, "have presented frightful spectacles, wanting to have terrible ones, we French halt too soon, from a dread of being carried too far; and sometimes we never reach the tragical from an apprehension that we may exceed its limits."

But he was not the man boldly to furnish the example of a revolution in which he had reason to fear that he might not be followed by the public. "There is no true tragedy of Orestes without the cries of Clytemnestra," said he in 1750,

\* Written in England.

in writing to Count d'Argental; "but if this Greek meat be too hard of digestion for the stomachs of the *petit-maitres* of Paris, I admit that we should not give it to them all at once."

He came, accordingly, like Crebillon, to fancy himself infinitely more terrible than he appears at the present day, and than in reality he is. His *Mahomet* had been blamed as fit for nothing but making Ravaillacs and Jacques Clements; he had had to withdraw the play after three representations. But while protesting against the odious tendency which people had affected to see in it, he felt evident complacency at the idea of having frightened the spectators. "I know not," he writes to the King of Prussia, "that horror was ever carried so far on any theatre." It was the statuary frightened at the Jupiter he had created. He might have set his mind at rest. His Jupiter was made of beautiful marble; but Shakspeare's rough freestone is much nearer having the breath of life in it.

III.—Shakspeare! what a bugbear for Voltaire. A bugbear when people set themselves to admire him at the expense of France; and still more a bugbear when he felt he was carried away into admiring him himself.

We will not amuse ourselves by collecting the contradictory opinions he has pronounced on the great tragic poet of England. Sometimes he cannot sufficiently tell us to what a point he thinks him ignoble, ridiculous, and barbarous; again, after having repeated and amplified the evil he has said of him elsewhere; "there is one thing," he adds,\* "more extraordinary than all you have read; it is, that Shakspeare is a genius. Italians, French, literary men of all countries that have not passed some time in England, take him only for a merry-andrew of the fair, for a clown far below Harlequin.

\* *Philosophical Dictionary.*

It is in this man, nevertheless, that you find pieces that elevate the imagination and pierce the heart. It is truth, it is nature herself speaking her own language, without any admixture of art. It is the sublime, and yet the author has not sought for it." Voltaire had said this before in other terms in his *Lettres Philosophiques*.

He was not only nonplussed by this medley of pearls and dirt, of which Shakspeare was, in his opinion, made up; he had further to battle with the consequences of the position which he had assumed in regard to England.

It was with the name of England, in fact, that he bore himself up in all the conflicts of the day. It was from her, he used to say, that he had learned to think; it was towards her that the eyes of philosophers, sages, and free men were to be kept steadily directed.

We have already remarked on this subject, how far his England was from the true. He had seen all England in a small number of thinkers. He had tasted the sweets of her liberty, but had understood nothing of the institutions, the laws, the morals, that permitted her to be free without danger.

Be that as it may, after having praised her so much, he was in a bad position for criticizing a man whom she admires, and he could not admire that man without opening a door for the admission of dramatical liberties, the width of which quite alarmed him.

He was, moreover, almost the only Frenchman that had studied Shakspeare; for, notwithstanding the influence which, thanks to Voltaire, England exercised on the ideas of Europe, the English language was hardly more known than under Louis XIV. In 1762, when he sent the Academy his translation of the English Julius Cæsar, "The Academy," d'Alembert wrote to him, "trusts to you for the faithfulness of the

translation, not having, besides, the original before them." So that there was not a single person among them who knew the original well enough to judge how far it was a good translation !

German was still less known than English. "I have seen the time," Grimm writes in 1766, "when a German showing some symptoms of wit was looked upon as a prodigy." That time was not very remote ; indeed it might be doubted how far it was actually past.\* The admiration of the French for the King of Prussia, did not extend to his country's language, which, besides, he was the first to revile, and which he considered radically incapable of ever being turned to good account. The sole literary glory he durst hope for Germany, was to imitate France, herself an imitatrix of the ancients. "Taste will never pass into Germany," he wrote to Voltaire in 1775, "unless by the study of the classics, Greek and Roman as well as French. Two or three men of genius will rectify a language, will make it less barbarous, and will naturalize among themselves the finest works of foreigners." Three years afterwards, he has a quarrel, he says, with the Count de Montmorency Laval, who wanted to learn German. "I tell him that it is not worth his pains, seeing we have no good authors." He was willingly believed. Had not Voltaire said that he wished the Germans more wit and fewer consonants ? And the truth of what Voltaire had said, none ever for a moment thought of questioning.

But Voltaire would have preferred, in 1762, finding the Academy a little more learned in the English tongue. He was fond of speaking in the name of public opinion, even when he had to make it say what without him it would not

\* The *Journal Etranger*, published from 1754 to 1762, had hardly done more than make known some pieces written under French influence, and French before being translated. The chief editors were Grimm himself, Fréron, and the Abbé Prevost.

have said ; he never liked to speak alone, and to remain himself responsible for his ideas. He could have wished the learned corporation to assume somewhat more positively the responsibility of his attacks on the English tragic drama, as he made it share with him, at the same epoch, that of his commentaries on Corneille.

Accordingly, during a course of years, we see him waging with Shakspeare only an underhand and indecisive warfare. He censures, he praises him ; he is afraid to seem to pronounce a final judgment.

But meanwhile, some Frenchmen had been studying Shakspeare, and behold ! they were praising him at the expense of the French. Then it was that Voltaire openly took the lead of the party that stood up for the ancient tragedy. It was now the national flag that he waved ; it was a crusade that he preached against Shakspeare and the Shaksperians. Moreover, he had no longer any occasion to spare England. All that he had carried out of her, was by this time naturalized in France.

In 1762, we have seen, under the sound of the cannonading of the Seven Years' War, he had wanted the Academy too, after its own manner, to point its musket at the English.

In 1776, at the age of eighty-two, he gave the signal for this new engagement. The Academy received a long letter, a formal act against the English drama, personified in Shakspeare. It was resolved that it should be read at the St. Louis, at a public and solemn meeting. "In fine, my dear master," writes d'Alembert to the author, "behold the signal given and the engagement begun ; Shakspeare or Racine must, one or other, bite the dust."

Racine did, in fact, begin to appear in the cause. Letourneur had published his translation of Shakspeare, accompanied with exaggerated praises, and much softened down, besides,

where a literal rendering would have grated on French ears. It is true, that in softening down the bad he had likewise damaged the good, and that his Shakspeare had, in fact, had almost as much of his own in it as of the original. While a few were influenced by real admiration, and a few, nay many, by that spirit of innovation which was then fermenting in all men's minds, there were some, even in the Academy, who were not far from admiring him.

But Voltaire had summoned the ban and the rear-ban of his devoted followers. The grand blow was now to be struck. "Farewell," continues d'Alembert; "on Sunday, in joining the charge, I will cry, Long life to St. Denis Voltaire, and death to St. George Shakspeare." Next follows, as always, a small piece of wit levelled at the French. "These insolent English must be made to see," says he, "that our men of letters know better how to fight them than our soldiers do."

The grand affair of the public reading passed off. Two days afterwards, "The Marquis of Villevieille," d'Alembert writes again, "had, my dear and illustrious master, to start for Ferney yesterday. He proposed to found some post-horses, in order to have the pleasure of being the first to announce your success. It was all that you could wish, I need not tell you that the English who were there, came away much chopfallen—and even some French, too, who are not content with being beaten by them on land and sea, and would further have us to be beaten by them on the stage. . . . I have read your piece with all the interest of friendship, and all the zeal inspired by the good cause—I may add, with the interest inspired by my own little share of vanity, for I had it much at heart not to see that cannon miss fire, after having undertaken to apply the match."

Then it was that Voltaire, intoxicated, as it were, with the smell of the powder, rushed anew upon his prostrate foe. He

hastened to replace in his letter the quotations which could not be read in the presence of ladies; he printed the whole, and—"I am ever amazed," he wrote, "that a nation which has produced men of genius, full of taste, and even of delicacy, should still affect to be vain of this abominable Shakspeare."

IV.—What then was this letter, on the credit of which the Academy thought it might safely decide against this abominable man?

Shakspeare had dearly paid the costs. Here were passages extracted from his principal dramas, and translated with a burlesque exactness. Voltaire does not even affect the semblance of impartiality by joining to these one or two fine passages. In the bad ones, he attaches himself particularly to the most filthy; for, while repeating that he quotes them with horror, he is delighted to throw down, as he proceeds in his course, some food for the depraved spirits of his day. Of discussion, there is none; of principles, still less. The very lowest of our literary magazines would not admit such an article. His reflections are confined to repeating: "See now the man whom Letourneur would pretend to make a god!" In fine, "Figure to yourselves," says he, "Louis XIV. in his gallery at Versailles, surrounded by a brilliant court. A clown, covered with rags, rushes through the crowd of heroes, great men, and beauties, that compose the court; he proposes that they should quit Corneille, Racine, and Molière, for a mountebank, who has some happy strokes, and who makes contortions. How think you would this offer be received?"

Yes, no doubt, Shakspeare would have been very ill received by the majestic sovereign, who called out, at the sight of one of the interiors of Teniers: "Take away, take away these baboons." Yes, we might add, if we durst, there has been exaggeration, and much of it, in the praises bestowed on

Shakspere, in the sort of worship of which he has become the object. All the deformities exposed by Voltaire are really in his dramas, accompanied with many others. They are mingled there, if you will, with undeniable beauties; but one must have a singular faculty of abstraction to admire these without having his mind affected by their accompaniments. Next, people have come to consider fine and admirable whatever is not decidedly worthless or low. His chief characters have been turned into types, prodigiously amplified and embellished by the imagination. The new readers dislike being behind the old, for a man may be afraid, by remaining unaffected, to confess that he has a less penetrating wit, and a less poetical soul, than others; and thus a factitious idolatry spreads far and wide, such as would astonish no one more, could he witness it, than the man who is its object. Does any one honestly believe that Shakspere was conscious of one half of the merits that are ascribed to him? One of the worst turns that you could do him, would be to bring together, not his bad passages, but the absurd testimonies of admiration and adoration with which he has been loaded. "I would go to the stake for the primacy of Shakspere," wrote Walpole to Madame du Deffand. "He is the finest genius that nature ever produced." "You do see nature in him," she replied; "but this, no doubt, only in so far as nature produces monsters." Would Madame du Deffand have been so severe, had Walpole not spoken of going to the stake to be burned for him? But Walpole has been surpassed, and that too by men who had not the excuse that he had of national vanity. Shakspere has had his fanatical admirers everywhere. If Voltaire was indignant at hearing him called, by Letourneur, "the creating god of the sublime art of the drama, which received existence and perfection from his hands," what would he have said of those extraordinary pages, where M. von Schlegel



would have us to see deathless beauties in the very abominations which Letourneur had at least the modesty to soften down or obliterate? What would he have said of the following incredible summary?\*" This Titan of tragedy assaults heaven, and threatens to uproot the earth. More terrible than Æschylus, our hair stands on end, and our blood is frozen, on hearing him; and yet, withal, he possesses the charm of an amiable poesy. . . . He combines all that is deepest and loftiest in existence. . . . The natural universe, and the supernatural, have intrusted him with all their stores. In force he is a demigod, in divination a prophet—a tutelary genius, who soars above humanity." . . .

We must stop. This is either irony or raving.

V.—But there is a wide difference between admitting, as we do, that we cannot associate ourselves with this worship, and concentrating the question, as Voltaire did, on meaningless or low details. He never seemed to suspect that it had its philosophical side, that it touched on high theories. He does not see in Shakspeare any system but such as is no system at all—that of captivating the crowd with gross trivialities; he was incapable of perceiving in this chaos the dramatic theory to which the future was to belong.

Now what is this theory?

Shakspeare had probably never thought of it, for practice always goes before rules. We do not even say that, with him, it was a matter of genius; unless, however, it be maintained—and this also has its true side—that nature is genius, and that one must have genius in giving himself up to nature.

It has been said, Racine and his school have portrayed *man*; Shakspeare and his school have portrayed *men*. The one made reasonable beings of his characters; the other real

\* *Course of Dramatic Literature. Third Lecture.*

beings. In Racine we find, not men, but personifications; in the English dramatist, what we have, before all things, is men. Schiller compared the heroes of French tragedy to the kings in certain old engravings, where they are always seen, whatever they were about, and even when in bed, with the crown, sceptre, and royal mantle. The crown might be of gold, the mantle magnificently wrought; the improbability was only the more striking.

The future, we have said, belonged to the other system, and Voltaire was in the wrong in not perceiving this. What are we to understand by that? Did not Racine's beauties belong, by their very generality, to all ages; and has human art done anything which we might regard, in this sense, as more surely in possession of the future? No; but the canvas was fully covered. The few places that Racine had left to be filled up, had been more than filled up by Crebillon and Voltaire. Either what was already painted had to be painted over again indefinitely, or the canvas had to be enlarged.

Voltaire made the attempt, but with an unheard-of timidity. He wanted plays to be more historical, and we have already seen how far his were from being so. He wanted real manners to be largely portrayed in them, and we have seen how little he knew how to get beyond classical manners. He wanted national plays, and the specimens he produced had hardly anything national but the names of the characters. He wanted more action, more *spectacle*; and the little that he threw into them more than Racine, seemed to him all he durst attempt. See how delighted and proud he is to have shown, in *Brutus*, the Roman senate met; and, in *Tancrède*, a circle of knights! "I laughed with delight," he writes to Count d'Argenson,\* "at strewing the scene with bucklers and pennons." But let no one venture to speak to him of admit-

\* June 1759.

ting a sight, in that same Tancred, of the scaffold which Tancred was to ascend! He became indignant at the very thought of it, and besought all his friends in Paris to oppose such an innovation. "I have been calling thirty or forty years," he writes to Mademoiselle Clairon,\* "to have something given us to look at in our conversations in verse, called tragedies; but much more noise should, I make were Tyburn to be brought upon the scene." And to Madame du Deffand: "I have held my ground against M. d'Argental. I am very fond of having something to look at—showy furniture, all the pomps of the devil; but as for the gallows, I am his humble servant." He was right; but where shall we place the boundary line? There, as elsewhere, he speaks of venturing; he would fain venture, but he has no idea of people venturing more than he. "Beware," he had written to Madame de Fontaine,† "of believing that I am composing a tragedy. Plenty of other men will compose them, and will supply, by the theatrical action I have recommended, what is wanting in genius which I still more recommend."

Such, in fact, was the danger to be dreaded, and, on this point, our age has but too well justified Voltaire's apprehensions. There is now an excess of action; movement has smothered thought. There are no more fine analyses, no more profound studies of character. Blows aimed this way and that; extravagant situations; a grandiose overdoing of parts associated with the most paltry littlenesses—this is what has succeeded the imposing nakedness of Racine and the harmonious frigidity of Voltaire and his followers.

Tragedy was of no country; she had no historical value. That merit, which she had insufficiently appreciated, some have wished, as if by way of punishment, to constrain her to make the main object of her efforts. She set herself to try,

\* October 1780.

† May 1759.

above all things, to become a school of history ; and now there is not an error, not a folly, which she has not taught in the name of the ages that are gone by. She was ignorant of the elements and of the use of what has been called *local colouring* ; and then she came to think all at once that she could not have too much of it. She has, accordingly, been inundated with it, and not tragedy only but the whole of our literature. With local colouring it has been thought that every defect can be supplied, and, as a matter of course, they who make most use of it, are those who, by the shallowness of their studies, have been rendered the least capable of discovering what of it is good, and of using it wisely. We have thus a return, but on a much larger scale, of Racine's mistake when he fancied that he had introduced Romans in his *Britannicus*, Hebrews in *Athalie*, and of Voltaire's when he pretended that he had portrayed the Arabs in *Mahomet*, Musulmans and Christians in *Zaire*. Nothing new under the sun.

## CHAPTER XIV.

- I.—The inheritance of the Greeks—To whom has it really passed?—Shakspeare at the court of Louis XIV.—Whom would he have surprised by his reclamations?
- II.—How came the eighteenth century to respect, in the drama, the rules of the seventeenth?—The history of literature presents several analogous facts—Some men are particularly given to complain of rules—One may have dreaded having a larger canvas to fill.
- III.—Voltaire and the three unities—Has action no more than one way of being *one*?—A palace and a forest—People had sometimes been nearer liberty than they supposed—Unity of place—Weakness of Voltaire's arguments—Can it be said that the Greeks observed it?—Unity of time—Arguments—He who says too much, says nothing—Improbabilities—The triple rule is no more taught in Aristotle than it is observed in the Greek dramas.—IV.—How Corneille came to submit to them—*Clitandre*—The *Menteur*—*Cinna*—How Voltaire submits to it—Discussion—One finds everywhere improbabilities still worse than those people want to banish—Cahusac—The imagination the sole ultimate judge in matters belonging to the imagination.

Was the system itself, as rejected by Voltaire in his attacks on Shakspeare, and as laid down, after Shakspeare, by our cotemporaries, really new?

We have just quoted the close of Voltaire's letter. He supposed Shakspeare to appear amid the pomps of Versailles, and to demand that Corneille, Racine, and Molière, should be abandoned for him.

This, we confess, would be a very bold demand; but what if, instead of making it, we suppose him content to say:—

“You think you are imitating the Greeks? But you are mistaken. I have not imitated them—how could I?—for I was not acquainted with them; but, like them, I have abandoned myself to my own inspirations, to nature; and, in

fine, I find myself much nearer them than you are. You think it strange that the burlesque and the terrible should be blended in my dramas? Recollect Hercules and his drinking songs,\* Hippolytus and his ribald jests on women.† Reproach me not with what is simple and vulgar, for you will not easily find a Greek drama the tone of which is not in many passages infinitely below the tone of yours. No salvation, say you, beyond the three unities. Begin, then, with anathematizing Æschylus, Euripides, Sophocles even, for there is not, I believe, a single play of theirs in which all three are really observed. The law is Aristotle's, not theirs in whose name he made it."

If Shakspeare, we say, then, had held this language, what could there have been said in reply?

Both in history and in literature there are facts which people have become habituated not to see, precisely, it would appear, because none are more visible, more undeniable. None, perhaps, at Versailles, would have been more surprised at these remarks than those who had oftenest had occasion to make them—those who, like Racine, had passed their lives in the company of the Greek tragedians. Even at the present day, how many would be scandalized at being told that the true heirs of the Sophocleses and the Euripideses are neither Racine nor Voltaire, but Shakspeare, but Schiller, but—setting aside the irregularities into which they may have fallen—those romantic writers who have so long thought themselves the grand enemies of the Greeks! It was not only the future, as we have said, that belonged to Shakspeare, it was also the past. The school of the seventeenth century was only a magnificent exception.

II.—But how are we to explain, amid the subversions of

\* Euripides, *Alceste*.

† Euripides, *Hippolytus*.

the eighteenth century, the persistence with which the dramatic traditions of the seventeenth maintained their ground? Even after the explosion of 1789, the old unities continued to be respected. Even under the Reign of Terror, it was with the forms employed by Racine that the drama chimed in with the bloody frenzies of the moment, and, if there were any innovators, they were to be found rather in the ranks of the resistance. The elder Chenier, a revolutionist, was a Racinian; the other, who was doomed to the scaffold, announced, and had a hand in preparing, all the poetical bold strokes of the nineteenth century. "While the Convention still spoke, with Robespierre and Saint-Just, the classic language of the eighteenth century, pure as the cockade of the old government, Chateaubriand was already making for himself that tricolor idiom, in which king and people had each a part, a patchwork of purple and rags, of royalty and democracy, of grandeur and littleness, which was so well fitted to represent the motley state of things so redolent of all past fortunes."\*

Thus, respect for the laws of the drama had survived respect for all laws beside. Did we say that this anomaly was the result of Voltaire's influence, we should only change the position of the question. Why did Voltaire himself respect the old rules? How happened he to find his cotemporaries disposed to respect them?

First, it has often happened, that at the very moment when people respect nothing, they set themselves to respect something, as if to prove that they are still capable of respecting some laws, or, at least, some conventional proprieties. One may have seen, in morals, men far from regular, far from scrupulous on great principles, submit themselves, in small matters, to laws which have become sacred in their eyes; we have seen, too, in our own days, a curious instance of the

\* Quinet

same fact in literature. At the very height of the anti-classic fever, when people seemed to make it their amusement to break, and cut, and hack verse, they showed themselves more scrupulous than the classics themselves with regard to exactness of rhymes. Hugo rhymed better than Voltaire, who, not content with often admitting bad rhyme, had formally approved of some that were quite inadmissible, such as *contagion* and *poison*.\*

But the eighteenth century had very different reasons for desiring to see the reign of Aristotle perpetuated in the drama.

Two classes of men are particularly subject, in literature, to complain of rules : men of genius and blockheads.

Now, in the eighteenth century absolute silliness was rare, and genius still more so. People held—we do not except Voltaire ; we have elsewhere explained in what sense the idea of mediocrity was applicable to him—people held, we say, a certain medium highly favourable to the maintenance of what did not trammel philosophical liberty, being the only liberty then cared for. Voltaire might, indeed, murmur from time to time against the necessity for confining the action of a play within four-and-twenty hours, and bringing into one place all the characters called to take a part in that action ; but he felt, in reality, the facility which those very trammels afforded for reaching the limits of known art. The canvas was narrow, but was all the more easily filled ; he would have dreaded a larger one, for he would have endeavoured to fill it equally well ; and he had the consciousness of his being wanting, in order to that, in historical erudition, in imagination, in the knowledge of man, in patience. A skilful artist, he was sensible that on art being once simplified or changed, his dexterity would become to him so far useless. The moulds were old, but then he knew them so well ! He had repaired

\* Letter to M. de Genonville, 1719.



them so adroitly. Were they to be thrown away, it was to him that people would look for new ones. He would then have had to create, but on what plan? Next, had he even had some more settled ideas of what the enfranchised drama might become, he could not wish to see the enlargement of a sphere which he had filled, not without effort, with the rays of his glory.

III.—Accordingly, in the whole of his warfare with La Motte on the subject of the three unities, he has a little of the air of a man who is pleading his own cause, and who needs, notwithstanding, to be himself persuaded that he is right. "It is proper," says he in his preface to *Œdipe*,\* "to defend these ancient laws, not because they are old, but because they are good and *necessary*."

*Necessary* is an elastic idea, never to be used in argument without having first inquired whence it has been taken, and to what, in reality, it is applied.

Now, of these three ancient rules, there is one only the necessity for which springs from the nature of things—it is the unity of *action*. This Voltaire defends very well, but on ground on which it has never been attacked. No one has ever said, in theory, that the action may dispense with being *one*; but it should first of all be seen whether there be no more than one way of its being so.

It will then be necessarily admitted that there are several. In a palace with but a single window too wide or too narrow, a single column too tall or too short, you break unity; in a picture representing a city, a mountain, a forest, provided the light be well distributed, the utmost variety of the masses need not prevent its being *one*.

Now the palace is Racine, the forest is Shakspeare, it is the

\* That of 1729.

drama as we understand it at the present day, such, in many respects, as even the Greeks understood it. Shakspeare's wider unity will consequently admit, without being broken, episodes and details which the other will not admit. In the latter, in a word, we can tolerate only what is essential to the action, what leads straight to the contemplated end; in Shakspeare's drama, by means of certain conditions of interest, proportion, and arrangement, all that is of a nature to concur towards the development of the characters, may enter into the structure of the whole.

No person in France had ever studied the question under this point of view. Not only was it not understood that an action could be one any otherwise than according to Boileau, but people continued to admire, as if in conformity with that law, plays which rather proved that it might be opened out. In *Andromache*, for instance, Orestes would be loved by Hermione, Hermione by Pyrrhus, and Pyrrhus by Andromache, whose only wish is to save her son, and to remain faithful to the memory of Hector. Is this unity, in the strict meaning of the ancient rule? But people had become so accustomed to look upon its observance as indispensable, that they could not even suspect that any admired play could anywise depart from it. Had any one repeated to Voltaire, using other names, and as a work of Shakspeare, this fourfold intrigue of *Andromache*, he would have thought it a most ridiculously irregular play. Others might be adduced, even from among his own, in which unity of action is as little observed, and to which, without any enlargement of the plot, there might be given all Shaksperian amplitude. *Mahomet* and *Zaire* would lend themselves admirably to become what the author so unadvisedly boasted of having made them—a living picture of the ideas and manners of two grand epochs in history.

In the question of unity of place, Voltaire is hardly less absolute, even while giving still weaker reasons. "A single action," he says, "cannot happen in several places at once. If the personages I see are at Athens in the first act, how can they be in Persia in the second? Has M. le Brun painted Alexander at Arbela and in the Indies on the same canvas?"

No, it might be replied, but on two, which, notwithstanding, you see with pleasure, first the one and then the other, even although it may be said likewise that it is absurd to show us in the same gallery, upon the same wall, a man at Arbela and in India. Why should we not consider two successive acts of the same play as two pictures presented successively to our eyes? In Greece, the three dramas of which the trilogy was composed, were at bottom but three acts of one and the same drama; and, although often played in succession, never did people dream of insisting on unity of place between the three. You cannot even say, strictly speaking, that it was insisted on in the case of the isolated drama. The scene was never empty, and the whole formed in reality but one act. Unity of place was thus quite natural, and we cannot on this ground frame a law for plays consisting of several acts.

What, in fine, says Voltaire, of unity of time? "The spectator is at the play only three hours; the action ought not, therefore, to exceed three hours."

This is logical; but to prove too much, is to prove nothing. There is not perhaps a tragedy in existence that is rigorously conformed to the rule thus understood. Yet it is the only correct way to understand it, for, the moment you allow four-and-twenty hours—and you cannot but allow that—unity of time becomes a mere word.

Shall we repeat what has been so much insisted on, as to the inconveniences of this rule, even when enlarged, even

when abandoned, in fact, from the moment of its being regarded as admitting twenty-four hours?

"We are affected only by things that are like the truth. Now what likeness to truth is there in things being made to happen in one day, which could hardly take place in less than several weeks?"

It is Racine who has said this. He had composed *Bérénice*; he had congratulated himself on having found a subject so docile to his law; he did not perceive that he was pronouncing the condemnation of his other plays. How many shall we find in the whole range of the French drama, where the action might be supposed to have taken place within twenty-four hours? \* How many such had the Greeks themselves? But the rule, in their eyes, was so far from being what it was afterwards made, that they did not even attempt to conceal their violations of it. The chorus did not quit the stage; it was during the singing of a few strophes that events took place, and that whole days elapsed. In the *Trachinians* of Sophocles, the voyage from Thessaly to Eubœa is performed thrice. In the *Suppliants* of Euripides, Theseus sets off for Thebes, where he goes to fight a battle, and the chorus has not sung forty verses when we hear of the victory.

Our unities, then, were not observed by the Greeks. This begins at last to be generally admitted. To complete our being in the truth, we must advance one step farther, and admit that they are not in Aristotle, such, at least, as they have for so long a while been considered to be.

Of unity of place he says nothing. His other counsels assume it; but we have already seen that it was less a rule than a fact for the drama to have but one act.

\* It is in vain that improbability is dissembled in the course of the play; it seldom fails to burst out at the close. Facts accumulate; the last quarter of an hour is generally desperately fruitful in incidents.

No more can it be said that he enjoins the unity of time. "The epic," says he, "has no determined time; but tragedy endeavours to keep within the daily course of the sun, or extends a little beyond it." That is all. He lays down no rule; he merely relates. The custom seems good to him, but he does not make it a law.

Unity of action he desires; but how does he understand it? Why, in the largest and most liberal sense. Let there be a unity of interest, and if that be secured, he is content; indeed he will be all the better pleased the more things you shall have attached to this central, sole, essential interest. "The more extent a play shall have, the finer it will be, provided the spectators can grasp it as a whole." Thus Aristotle does not consider as hurtful to unity of action whatever genius and art can contrive to make concur towards the sole and final object.

IV.—Corneille has himself told us how he came to accept the rule which his authority was to render inviolable.

In 1632, in the preface to *Clitandre*, he says—"If I have brought this piece within the rule of one day, it is not that I repent of not having done this with *Mélite*, or that I am resolved to attach myself to it for the future. Some worship that rule; many despise it. For myself, I have only wished to show that if I depart from it, it is not for want of knowing it."

Notwithstanding this assurance, and a tone savouring somewhat of fanfaronade, which was that of the epoch, Corneille yielded to the torrent. The more one felt the necessity of having recourse to the ancients, the more was it thought prudent not to pick and choose among their precepts, even were submission to the observance of them to be made still more severe than with themselves. Ten years after the ap-

pearance of *Clitandre*, in a preface to the *Menteur*, Corneille makes it a merit not to have exceeded the time prescribed. "The unity of the day is not violated," says he, "provided you allow *full four-and-twenty hours*."

Such is the result of adopting arbitrary rules; people obey the letter and fancy themselves safe from all reproach. The *Menteur* lasts *a day*. Corneille is content, and presents his play with confidence; one half-hour more, and he would think himself obliged to ask pardon. But how is this day made up? Of an afternoon, a night, and the morning of the day that follows. Now is this the spirit of the law? Is this period of time ordinarily called *a day*? No matter. One day is four-and-twenty hours. The author thinks he has not exceeded his right, and the rule itself has permitted him to elude the rule.

As for the unity of place, he gets out of it still more cavalierly. "The play commences at the Tuileries," says he, "and ends at the Place Royale. The unity of place is not violated, for both are within Paris."

The sophism re-occurs in his reflections on *Cinna*. "The first act," says he, "takes place in the apartment of Emilia, the second in that of Augustus. But the unity of the place extends to the whole palace." And Voltaire, who blamed the *Menteur* for occupying two days, approves of this strange interpretation of another law.

This indulgence he often needed for himself. Has he not on one occasion gone so far as to declare this in the very course of a play? In the first act of *Brutus*, when Aruns and Albinus find themselves alone, the author adds, in a note, that "they are supposed to have entered from the audience hall into another apartment in the house of Brutus."

Had Voltaire, had our tragic writers, good as well as bad, and perhaps chiefly the good, appended such notes wherever

they were needed, how many tragedies should we have without a goodly number of them? How many have we in which the unities are observed otherwise than by avoiding improbabilities. Our classics have given themselves, in reality, all the facilities for which the free drama has been blamed; but, ever occupied about saving appearances, they have used them without enjoying the advantage of them in the development of action, character, and manners.

If you consider yourself faithful to the unity of place, provided your personages go not beyond the same city, or even the same palace—if I, a spectator, consent to the successive transformation of the same flooring into two localities, near to one another, but as different, in fact, as if they were several leagues apart—why should I not indulge you in a little more latitude? Why would you interdict yourself from transporting me into another building or into another town? Of all theatrical improbabilities there are none that are more easily effaced. No sooner are the first words of a new act uttered, however little justifiable the change of place, and the acting resumed with interest, than our journey is already performed. Five hundred leagues have cost us no more trouble than five hundred steps. When Voltaire asks us to suppose that two men remaining on the same spot, have passed from one apartment into another, he imposes a far harder task on our imagination, in itself, than he who should demand a great change of place from one act to another. Elsewhere, we find him fall foul of the architects. "It is their fault," says he, "when a theatre does not represent the different places in which the action is carried on, a street, a temple, a palace, a lobby, a cabinet." He would have found it no easy matter to furnish the plan for such a theatre. In one of his plays, to avoid transporting his characters, it is the localities themselves that he in some sort brings to them. The reader may remember

*Semiramis*. First you have the tomb of Ninus, high in the air in front of the palace. In the third act, behold, it rests on the hall, beside the queen's throne. In the fifth act, it reappears in its old place. We are told that it is very large, that it has vast underground passages; but these are evidently there merely for the purpose of palliating the improbability. Were it more complete and more free, would it shock us as much? "From a dread of sinning against the rules of art," said the Academy, in its judgment on the *Cid*, "the poet has preferred sinning against those of nature." This was the history, by anticipation, of the French drama for a century and a half.

As for the duration of a play, we would no more than Boileau have any of the *dramatis personæ* to appear as "a child in the first act," and "a graybeard in the last." But if it be only his appearing a few years older, wasted by vice, or by disappointment and sorrow, changed, in a word, within the limits of what a skilful actor may express by an alteration of his figure and his dress, to this our imagination nowise refuses to yield itself. If the play be interesting in other respects, we should have more violence to do to ourselves in condemning him upon the ancient rule; than we should have difficulty in abandoning ourselves to the course of a more complicated action. There is less improbability, let people say what they please, in a play thus conceived, than in the double concentration of former times, of a long action in twenty-four hours, and then of those twenty-four hours in the two or three actually spent in the theatre.

Is not all, moreover, improbability in the playhouse? Did we look at things coldly, what should we see there but a tissue of absurdities? The mere use of verse would be an enormous one; and it at once requires no small stretch of the imagination to figure a Roman speaking French or English.



Why, then, should we refuse to go as far as the effort will carry us? Cahusac, in his essay on dancing, was the first to explain how it is not a matter of indifference representing a piece by daylight or by artificial light. That artificial light is the commencement of imitation, preparing and facilitating the imitations that follow. Well, then, without even going to a representation, the moment we begin to read a play, we enter an atmosphere which is imitated, and favourable, by virtue of that alone, to all imitations. It is there we must be transported, and there maintain ourselves, in order to judge of what is and what is not to be tolerated, of what is within or beyond the true and sound limits of art.

## CHAPTER XV.

- I.—Shall we go so far as to regret that the triple rule reigned in France?—It is doubtful if our classics, had they been more free, would have done better—Liberty is not always the condition of genius—The literary superiority of the seventeenth century was intimately connected with the existing state of things—Let us not praise the unknown at the expense of the known.
- II.—Of the present reaction in favour of the ancients—The eighteenth century led to it by its contempt for them, and its admiration of itself—Voltaire and Euripides—Voltaire and Sophocles—Some men faithful to the ancient worship—M. de Malzeville—The Abbé Arnaud—Their successors of the present day—Racine and his school viewed in the light of Greek art—Is the *Iphigenia* of Euripides more true to nature than that of Racine?—Two *trues*—Which is the better of the two?
- III.—Were the Greek tragic writers correct historians?—Traditions rather literary than historical—Are we sure that the *king of kings* had no guards?—Nausicaa—The kitchen of Achilles—Details and types of Convention—Was Racine wrong in making his Hippolytus a lover?—That of Euripides.

WHILE we acknowledge that the unfettered drama has in its favour reason and nature, shall we go so far as to regret that the seventeenth century took a different course, and that the eighteenth followed it?

Some tell us, that if the French school has produced, in spite of so many trammels, pieces of such excellence, it would have been far more prolific had no such trammels existed.

Others maintain, on the contrary, that it needed these trammels, and that to them it owes all its greatest beauties.

We have already seen that this is true of Voltaire, and that he was the first to be sensible of it. But did it hold true with respect to Racine and C  raille? We think it did.

With respect to Racine it is evident. Of a calm and gentle genius, we cannot suppose him sighing for the hazardous advantages of liberty. He was happy to have guides. He never quitted his masters; he could not quit them for a moment without being frightened to find himself alone, and, even where he abandons himself to his genius, he would fain still fancy himself obedient. Whatever he could not justify by an example he would condemn himself to expunge.

Corneille has had a reputation for audacity which is well enough justified by some of his critical opinions, but ill enough by the general character of his works.

He has been praised for having submitted with reluctance to laws which were to become those of the French theatre. It has been said, that it was his genius that protested, and turned a look of bitter disappointment upon the wide career from henceforth closed upon its ardour.

Are we quite sure of this? There was something that was more disposed to recalcitrate than genius; it was bad taste. Now, in this struggle, Corneille was, on more than one occasion, its advocate. He did not demand liberty; he regretted license. Let us not forget that his best works were all posterior to his submission. He, too, therefore, needed restraint. His not perceiving this, or his not confessing it, is no reason for our supposing that he would have found it for his advantage to have been more free.

One would be very much mistaken were he to believe that liberty is always the condition of development. There are plants that require an absolutely unfettered development; there are others that owe all their beauty and their vigour to salutary restraint; there are some, in fine, which, according to countries and seasons, require freedom or restraint. Now, genius is one of these last. There are times and countries in which it pants for freedom, and expires if it cannot be free;

there are others in which it is it that requires laws, and not only literary laws, but a solid body of political and civil laws.

This is what we see in France in the seventeenth century. To ask, as has so often been done, by what happy exception an epoch of despotism produced works of first-rate excellence, shows an ignorance of that epoch, of its spirit, and of its men. The absolute monarchy of that age appears to us to have been, in it, much less an obstacle to overcome in order to produce, than the essential condition of the products. All the works of that time, as one cannot but feel in studying them, drew from that source both their regularity and their grandeur—that is to say, what has made them live. All the men who were inspired by Louis XIV. and his laws, we defy you to figure to yourselves—if you transport them in imagination into the midst of the eighteenth century—as otherwise than out of their element, vacillating, and incapable of protecting themselves. The long life of the Chancellor d'Aguesseau is a sad enough proof of this. A great man under Louis XIV., what does he become under Louis XV.? He preserves his virtues, but what does he make of them? They serve him no other purpose than that of covering—first amid groans, and with a little struggling, afterwards with a deplorable yielding to the times—faults and acts of injustice of every kind. Who will assure us that Bossuet, under Louis XV., would have remained Bossuet? The whole generation was of this character. It felt its strength; it felt also its weakness. It did justice to itself when, in politics, it wound itself round a strict government; and, in literature, round those old laws, the severity of which it still further augmented.

Again, though all should be to do over again—though we should have to choose betwixt what Corneille and his followers have left us, and what they would have left us under a wider system—it would not be very easy for one to resign

himself to abandoning *Cinna*, *Iphigénie*, and *Mérope*, for we know not the masterpieces which we should have had in their place. Let us grant, as we must, that the seventeenth century laid down rules that were too strict; still, looking at what they have given us, let us not anathematize them.

II.—No more let us allow the charge to be carried too far, that has been brought against our classics, of having departed from nature, and having been, on this point, too little faithful to those Greeks to which, on others, they were only too faithful.

It is the fashion at present to prefer Euripides to Racine. The latter is admitted to possess more elegance, more art; but the natural, the true, is thought to be more with Euripides. M. von Schlegel first drew attention, in 1808, to this new phase in the suit for ever depending between the ancients and the moderns.

It had been prepared, it must be confessed, and rendered almost inevitable, by people running into the opposite excess. For near a century Greek art had been called rudeness, negligence, one might almost say silliness. Voltaire's only praise of Euripides, was his observing that Racine had imitated him: "What idea ought not one to have of a poet from whom Racine himself has borrowed some of his sentiments?"\* He himself, when he imitates them, thinks he does them infinite honour. They are barbarians whom he civilizes; they are rough blocks, out of which, following Racine's example, he would extract statues. Racine, an admirer even to superstition, does not dare to approach the subjects that have been treated by Sophocles, for Sophocles, he says, appals and overwhelms him; Voltaire, not content with commencing where Racine had refused to end, has the audacity to speak of that

\* Letter to M. de Genonville.

*Œdipus* of Sophocles, from which he took his own, as the work of a mere beginner, a tissue of improbabilities—and on this last point he is, unfortunately, in the right. We find him, accordingly, ridiculing with a deal of wit, for example, the first scenes; asking if *Œdipus*, after the plague had broken out in the city, could be ignorant of it; if the Thebans could have stood in need of his telling them, "I am *Œdipus*;" if he could have ascended the throne of *Laius*, after having even married his widow, without having known how *Laius* died. Such improbabilities, such faults, we cannot blame Voltaire for having seen; but at the same time, beyond these, he saw nothing, he felt nothing. It had been vain to attempt to show him how much of the affecting and the sublime there is in the exposition of Sophocles's drama—that weeping crowd, this king comforting them. He has had his laugh, that is enough; the Greek exposition is worthless.\* A prince with his confidant; this was faultless, and within the rules. And this taste was to be that of the age.

Here and there, notwithstanding, men were to be found faithful to the ancient worship. In the seventeenth century, antiquity was loved and respected without people being enthusiasts for it, since we cannot apply that term either to Racine's too humble admiration, or Dacier's heavy resentments. In the eighteenth, that general respect died away, but enthusiasm awoke in certain souls. Voltaire had attended in his younger days the poetical lectures of M. Malezieux. He had seen the lively old man quote a profusion of passages from Sophocles in the midst of the Sceaux holidays, and not only obtain a hearing, but even draw tears. Such, again, after M. de Malezieux, was the Abbé Arnaud. "When he took off his priest's dress, and threw some ancient drapery over his shoul-

\* Marmontel ventured, however, though long afterwards, to consider it beautiful.—See his *Elements of Literature*, article *Chœur* (Chorus).

ders, you seemed to have before your eyes a priest of Delphos or Heliopolis, a hierophant. He had quite the bearing, and, in his look, the inspiration of such a character. He understood many languages and admired only one, that of Plato and Homer; and, at the age of sixty, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* filled him with all the ecstasy of his youth. When he recited them—or, rather, when he sang them—with his Provençal accent, a relic of the Phocæan accent, one might have thought himself present at those solemnities of the Grecian continents and islands, where Homer's songs gave their aid to the religion and the enchantment of the national festivals."\*

But such instances were, and in the eighteenth century could only be, impotent exceptions. The worship of antiquity wants only such priests as love nature and solitude; but people had become enamoured of noise and art.

In passing to Shakspeare, our moderns have gone back to the admiration of the ancients; a proof, if any were wanted, of what we said above on the affinity that subsists between the ancient drama and the free drama of the English. After having attacked our classics as imitators of the ancients, it is through the ancients that some have begun to attack them.

On this subject some remarks have been very just, and others highly absurd.

Among the former, it has been said:—

That the school of Racine has reproduced the Greek forms, while the spirit has too often escaped it:

That its respect and love for the Greeks have not always been founded on their best qualities:

That the Greek tragic poets were national and popular poets; that there ought, consequently, to have been efforts made to be more so; and that this would have been the more

\* Garat. *Mémoires sur la Vie de Suard.*

real and more useful imitation, and a truer homage to their merits.

Among remarks that have less justice in them, we would notice, in particular, the much that has been said on the superiority of the Greeks in point of nature and truthfulness in the expression of the feelings.

What ought to be our opinion of their merit in this respect?

In speaking, as we have just done, of unity of action, the question was not, we said, was it necessary—for that is not disputed—but, whether there be only one way of having this unity.

Here we would make the same observation. That we must be natural and true is what no one has denied; but is there absolute oneness in nature? Is dramatic truth absolutely one? Let us see:

—"Father,

No longer grieve me; you are not betray'd;  
When you shall order, you shall be obey'd—  
My life is yours to take. . . .  
A yielding victim, if required, I'll know."....

This is what, in our days, some will have to be false.

"Let me not, father, prematurely die!  
This light is pleasant. . . . You would take my life. . . .  
Ah! do not take it. . . . One word only more,  
And strongest word of all: for mortals nought  
So sweet as to behold the light; the dead  
Are nothing. Sure the wish to die  
Is very madness! Surely better far  
To live in misery than with glory die."\*

This is what has been pronounced emphatically true; this is what has been contrasted, with great eulogiums, with the resignation of the French Iphigenia.

\* Another of the characters of Euripides, old Phérès, who refused to die for his son Admetus, professes the same maxims. "Let people speak evil of me," he says, "it is of little consequence to me after my death." And there is there also a scene rendered equally painful by the base behaviour of the father and the invectives of the son.



We say it distinctly; there is here a mistake. This is *true*, if you will, in this sense, that many a young woman, on being condemned to die, will weep, will cry, like that of Euripides; but have there never been found any gifted with more resignation and fortitude? And although, in the course of long centuries, we should find only one such, would not that single case be enough to prove that Racine's also is not beyond the limits of truth?

And now, of these two *true*s, which is the better? Both Iphigenias draw tears; which are the purer tears, which the tears we feel best pleased to have shed? One Iphigenia, with her terror and her screams, seizes us by the nerves; the other, with her tranquil heroism, seizes us by the soul. Which of these two ways would we rather be affected by?

Some modern tragic authors have been censured much and justly for having availed themselves so much of sensation. How many pictures, in fact, which make, not our souls, but our flesh shudder! Lucretia Borgia, like the Iphigenia of Euripides, has a terrifying apprehension of death. Blanche, the daughter of Triboulet, we find offering herself to it; but when the dagger approaches, "It will do me much harm," she says. Well, then, here we have natural sentiment, as we have it often in the Greek dramas. We admit, in all humility, that Racine seems to us to have acted rightly in not going there for it; and had it been this alone that Voltaire did not relish, we farther admit that we should have willingly forgiven him.

III.—Here is a remark that will appear strange and almost scandalous, but which will have less of that aspect, if not at once repelled.

In contemplating that excessive simplicity of manners and of language which the Greek poets have given to their heroes,

it may be permitted, it strikes us, to doubt how far, in this respect, they were faithful historians. Might not one suspect that on this point there were, in Greece, certain traditions, rather literary than historical, which there was no choice but to obey? There does not exist a single art the history of which does not present us with some example of the authority usurped, in the course of time, by facts altogether occasional in their origin.

The tone of the Greek drama, then, might, it is likely enough, have been so far at least a relic of the first sorry commencements of the dramatic art. People have laughed, we said, at the guards appointed by Agamemnon, in Racine, to accompany Clytemnestra. Are we quite sure, meanwhile, that the chief of the Greek army, the *king of kings*—of whom we are told in a hundred places in Homer, that never had prince so great an authority, he who had heralds for the transmission of his smallest orders—are we quite sure that the redoubtable Agamemnon had not about his person a handful at least of those armed satellites, of those *doryphori*, whom the Greek historians represent as surrounding the pettiest kinglets of the succeeding epoch? Could we believe that that same queen, when she waits, in throes of mortal agony,\* for the revenger of Agamemnon's murder, had not even a porter at her palace-door? We shall be told that such are the manners portrayed in Homer, and therefore long anterior to the commencements of the theatre. Well, then, are we blindly to believe Homer himself on these points? Nausicaa, a king's daughter, goes to wash linens in a stream!† It is possible, for she has women with her, and one may suppose that, strictly speaking, she did not confine herself to merely looking at them; but shall we admit that so many heroes and kings, surrounded with their servants, slaughtered and

\* Sophocles, *Electra*.

† *Odyssey*.

cooked, with their own hands, the animals with which they regaled their guests? Shall we any more believe, on the faith of Homer or the dramatists, that a Hercules, or a Theseus, traversed the world quite alone? Shall we admit that Telemachus and Mentor travelled without servants, without baggage, and on foot? These are so many points on which the Greeks manifestly departed from historical truth, to attach themselves to the simpler types which poetical or literary tradition obliged them to preserve. The same fact has been noticed in the romances of chivalry—brethren and successors, in many respects, of the ancient Greek poems. In these, too, conventional mingle with real types, and he who would seriously narrate the history of the Middle Ages has more need to depart from them than to follow them.

Let us not imagine, then, that the more we keep to the simple the more we keep to the natural and the true; let us not be so ready to think our classics depart from the latter, the moment they think they ought to amend the Greek types. It has, besides, more than once happened that details that had been censured as modern, have been found to be antique and of the purest antiquity. "Let us suppose," Voltaire has somewhere said, "that Euripides were to return to life and to be present at a representation of the *Iphigénie* of Racine. Would he not be revolted at seeing Clytemnestra at the feet of Achilles?" To this there is but one objection; it is, that the scene is precisely that of Euripides. "I will not blush," says the mother, grown desperate, "to embrace thy knees. A mortal, I can implore the son of a goddess. . . I implore thee, by this hand which I touch. . . I have no altar to fly to but your knees." . . . Racine does not make her say so much about it.

It is a grand affair, among Racine's admirers, to know whether he was right or wrong in making Hippolytus a

lover; he himself knew not well what to think of it. We shall return to the question of love in the drama; but whether Racine is to be blamed in this case or not, there is one point that we cannot yield; it is, that the ferocious Hippolytus of Euripides is more true than the French Hippolytus.

The Hippolytus of Racine, shall we be told, has less merit in resisting the incestuous love of Phedra, seeing his heart belonged to Aricia?

No, we might reply, for his general character and language assure us that he has no need to think of Aricia in order to reject with horror the crime conceived by Phedra.

But without stopping at this objection, might we not retort it? The French Hippolytus loves a woman; the other declares his hatred of the whole sex. Nay, more; this general and antecedent aversion he represents as the chief source of his indignation at Phedra.\* Immediately after the fatal communication, "O Jupiter!" he exclaims, "wherefore hast thou placed women in this world, that race of bad alloy! If it was thy wish to give existence to the human race, they should not have been made to be born of women."† . . . And the invective goes on. You would say it was some old bachelor describing the annoyances of domestic life. Dowry to give, learned or intractable wives, impertinent maid-servants, all is there; and you barely find at the close, some little indignation pointed against the crime in question.

Can you venture after this to find fault with Racine?

\* An author of the name of Gilbert composed, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, an *Hippolytus* modelled on the play of Euripides; but he imitated *The Insensible Bachelor*.

† This idea will be found also in *Paradise Lost*, but very differently justified by the situation.

## CHAPTER XVI.

- I.—The question of the natural and the true, the source of all literary controversies—Digression on the Bible—One of the causes of Voltaire's fierce dislike to it.—II.—He never had a genuine taste for antiquity—When he admires, it is always the admiration of a maker of verses admiring well-made verse—Bad points of view, and false principles.
- III.—The same reasons explain the little taste he had for La Fontaine—Criticisms which would seem inexplicable without that.
- IV.—Corneille—Voltaire waged a life-long war with him—Odd project—History of the *Remarks* on Corneille—The grandniece—A good work, and masterly stroke—Embarrassment of the Academy—D'Alembert's scruples and counsels—Not the less does Voltaire pursue his work.—V.—What his remarks are—Their littleness—Their immense number—Many useless, false, unjust—Incredible inaccuracies—Anti-dramatic judgments—Perfidious eulogiums—What was thought of this work—What it became, thanks to the efforts of Voltaire's friends and the feebleness of the public.

ALL literary controversies turn, in reality, on this everlasting question of the natural and the true. It is perpetually re-occurring, and it is for the critic to recognise it under the different forms with which it is from time to time invested.

There is no doubt, for example, that it entered largely into the animosities indulged by Voltaire against the Bible. On casting our eyes over what he has written against that book, we can see that his contempt for it as a book even went beyond what he felt for it as a revelation; and we feel, that could he have relished it more in a literary point of view, he would have hated it less in the religious point of view. Now, why this impossibility of relishing it? Just because it has nowhere its equal, as a book, in the natural and the true, and

that Voltaire, an excellent judge in taste, was, like his cotemporaries, wanting in any capacity for appreciating the rest. Even were we not grieved, as Christians, at his attacks on a book which to us is sacred, we should still find matter for astonishment at seeing such utter insensibility in him, a poet, a maker of fine verses at least, and even of Christian verses, to the poetical value of the Bible. The New Testament, in his eyes, had none ; and in the Old it was with difficulty that he could get himself to perceive some tolerable images, spoiled by a heap of things conceived in bad taste. What we have said of his remarks on Sophocles, might be applied to many of his anti-biblical observations. The details he considers absurd the moment he perceives a discrepancy between them and the ideas and conventionalisms of his own time ; as for the general scope, of that he never catches a glimpse, and does not seem to suspect that there can be any. Is it true that he had at times to do violence to himself in repressing open admiration for such or such a passage which laid hold of him in spite of himself? Possibly ; but the whole seemed to him wretched stuff, and it cannot be doubted that he was sincere in thinking the Bible a dull work. As we have already remarked, neither his mind nor his heart was formed to appreciate it.

II.—Antique poetry in general was hardly more accessible to him than that of the Greek tragic writers or of the Bible. Even while professing to admire it, he is little affected by it.

“Do you know Latin?” he writes to Madame du Deffand.\*  
“No. Therefore it is that you ask me whether I like Pope or Virgil best. Ah! Madam, all our modern tongues are dry, poor, inharmonious, in comparison with those that were spoken by our first masters, the Greeks and the Romans. We

\* May 1754.

are at best but country fiddlers. You know Virgil by translations; but poets are untranslatable. Can music be translated?"

This is well expressed, and, in its way, too, the sentiment is not bad. But mark that here he spoke only of verse, of language, in a word, of the material. It is ever the skilful maker of verses admiring skilful makers of verses; not a poet sympathizing with other poets. Those very men, accordingly, whom he may have spoken of with an enthusiasm altogether of the ear, you will find him, anon, tearing to shreds in their most cherished conceptions, and pitilessly pursuing into the chastest retreats whither they have gone to court the muse. "If," you find him say,\* "one would, without prejudice, put into the balance Homer's *Odyssey* with Ariosto's *Orlando*, the Italian will outweigh his rival in every respect. As for the *Iliad*, let any reader ask himself what he would think, were he to read, for the first time, this poem and that of Tasso, in ignorance of the names of the authors and of the times when these works were composed, judging solely by the standard of his own gratification. Could he avoid giving Tasso the preference in every respect?" Now, without pausing here to notice the shallowness and even childishness of such questions of preference, there is nothing more false than the principle on which he tells us to resolve them. He would have us suppose ourselves "ignorant of the times when these works were composed." This is to bid us neglect all historical, poetical, or other data, such as we require for understanding an author and relishing him. It is asking us to put away our eyes that we may not see, our ears that we may not hear, our hearts that we may not feel. Ever the same fatal system which we denounced as the source of the blunders and unjust opinions, then multiplying themselves without end in the field

\* *Essay on Manners*, ch. cxli.

of history ; ever those judgments formed under the influence of the cold and dry ideas of that epoch. History, we have said, was on the bed of Procrustes. Were not poetry and art there also ?

III.—The same considerations on the natural and the true might further explain to us why Voltaire had so little relish for La Fontaine, and made so many, happily unavailing, attempts to deprive him of the general admiration.

He sets him down, then, as much inferior to Boccaccio and Phædrus ; he advises\* his readers not to allow themselves to be caught by that pretended naturalness which, in his opinion, is often no better than “the familiar, the low, the careless, and the common-place.” He adduces, in support of this, several examples, which, even were they all perfectly just, still would not prevent La Fontaine from being admirable in a thousand other passages ; but there are, in the number, some of about the best things La Fontaine ever produced, and which, if they prove anything, prove that the critic was not made for appreciating them. He thinks it ridiculous for the fox to be made to say, that “he has a hundred tricks in his sack ;” he can see nothing more vulgar than the portrait of the heron, with his long legs and long beak, “hafted with a long neck.” In replying to the cricket,

“You were singing, were you ? I’m content ;  
And now to dance you’ve my consent.”

the ant seems to him only coarse. Her answer, to be sure, is not a very Christian speech, and we can understand how Rousseau saw in it a lesson which we should keep from our children ; but looking on these verses only as verses, and on the fable as a fable, it is not easy to understand what Voltaire could have seen bad in them.

\* *Age of Louis XIV.*



It is this fable which he further adduces, on another occasion,\* in trying to explain why Boileau, in his *Art of Poetry*, has said nothing on the fable and the great fabulist of France.

This omission, we know, has very much puzzled the critics. Some have said, that the fable was, in Boileau's eyes, beneath his notice; a reason which is hardly admissible when we think of what he has said of the sonnet, and, still more, of the esteem he felt for La Fontaine. Others will have it, that his silence was owing to La Fontaine's being out of favour with the court—which is untrue, for if not in favour, as little was he in disgrace, and he had paid his tribute, like everybody else, to the king, and to the king's mistress.†

Be that as it may, it was, according to Voltaire, because La Fontaine was a bad writer, and Boileau was scandalized at his "faults against language and the correction of style."‡ How could Boileau have tolerated that cricket which, having sung all summer,

"Went off to cry for want  
To her neighbour, the wise ant"?

Adding, that she will pay her debt,

"Both interest and principal,  
By my honour as an animal,  
I'll pay in August when you call!"

It is on this that Voltaire, always in the name of Boileau, tries to vent his indignation. Had he, again, confined himself merely to saying it was common-place and low, no more needed be said than that we are not of Voltaire's opinion; but that he should have felt himself called upon to adduce these verses as "containing faults of language," is an enigma

\* *Philosophical Dictionary*.

† Prologue to Book vii. of the *Fables*.

‡ It is curious that Voltaire, ordinarily so correct, makes a blunder in style at the very moment that he is speaking of blunders. One does not say, "a fault against the correction of style."

of which we cannot guess the meaning. One feels that he himself did not very well know why the great fabulist so displeased him. It was one of those instinctive antipathies which make us look for ugliness in the finest face, harshness in the mildest, silliness in the cleverest. But such antipathies have always a cause; good or bad, apparent or hidden, it is all the more real perhaps the more the antipathy is strange and the more it seems to attach itself to what is absolutely futile. Voltaire's attacks on La Fontaine are wretched quibbles, and between Voltaire and La Fontaine there lies an abyss.

"Nothing more insipid," he adds, "than the story of the drowned woman, of whom it was said, that her body had to be sought for by going up the stream, she had always been so full of the spirit of contradiction."

May we not say of Voltaire, throughout this whole discussion, that he was not unlike the drowned woman? And was it not going up against the stream, to set himself to discuss the reputation of La Fontaine?

IV.—That of Corneille, which he fiercely attacked for so long a time, was more open to discussion. Still it required courage in Voltaire, himself a tragic poet, to attack another tragic poet, the father of the French drama, and to brave the accusations of jealousy which such sad courage could not fail to provoke. Did he only give way to an inconsiderate zeal for what he believed to be the interests of art? Let us wave the motives and look to the work. Let us, most of all, look to how it was received, and what influence it had.

In the year 1719, on the occasion of his first piece, *Œdipe*, we find him come out at once with a criticism on the *Œdipe* of Corneille—a wretched play, it is true, and now no longer printed.

In 1732, in his *Philosophical Letters*: "What service would not the Academy render," he says, "to literature, to the language, and to the nation, if, instead of printing compliments every year, it would see to the printing of the best works of the age of Louis XIV., purged from all the faults of language which have slipped into them! Corneille and Molière are full of them; La Fontaine teems with them. Such as are incapable of correction, might at least be marked as faults."

This was an odd and absurd idea. Not that there was nothing to correct, even, it might be, in Racine; but figure to yourself such a fine piece of work! Racine and Bossuet, Molière and Pascal, *corrected*; the original text lost; the Academy, in short, carrying on this lamentable re-plastering from age to age, for, as expressions from time to time should become antiquated, they would have to be replaced by new ones! Add to this, new authors writing with the prospect before them of being re-plastered in their turn, as soon as they should be found antiquated enough, and illustrious enough to require that honour. What gratitude should we not have owed to the Greek or Roman academicians, that would have taken the pains to re-touch Demosthenes or Cicero, Homer or Virgil! "The good French books, carefully printed," adds Voltaire seriously, "would be one of the nation's most glorious monuments."

He abandoned, however, the strangest part of his proposal, and, renouncing the disfigurement of the texts, persisted in erecting one of these glorious monuments. To this we owe his *Remarks* on Corneille. "The more I read him," he would say,\* "the more I think him the father of galimatias as well as the father of the drama."

In 1761, he prevailed on the Academy itself to address a request to him that he would undertake this work. He would

\* Letter to d'Argental, 1751.

have the air of one who was obeying an order. It was not he, it was the French Academy, that desired these commentaries to be composed. He was, moreover, to submit them to its revisal; he was not to publish a line that had not received the approbation of that body.

Nor was this all. He had learned that a young woman, grandniece of Corneille, was obscurely vegetating in a condition bordering on actual want. Here there was a good deed to be done; here there was the best possible passport to the *Remarks*. Next, it would be a good joke to find a dowry for the grandniece at the expense of the granduncle's glory; and the enjoyment of this good joke was enough of itself to determine Voltaire. Shall it be said that no generous impulse was to have any part in what he was about to do for the heiress of such a name? It were sad to think this, and it is well that nothing compels us to do so. Voltaire was susceptible of the higher feelings; but he made so much noise about this good deed of his, he so manifestly sought and found his own advantage in it, that it were hard to define precisely what of fine feeling remained over and above.

It was a curious master-stroke, then, to get France to accept, as a national monument, a book in which the father of her drama was to be mercilessly dissected. Subscribers poured in from all quarters; the name of the king appeared at the head of the list.\*

The Academy had seen the trap that was laid for it. It yielded with regret, yet did not venture, the matter once on foot, to withdraw the sanction which it had been got to promise. The first literary corporation in Europe was the first to become the slave of a man who had not even permission to

\* "I proposed that the king should be kind enough to encourage me by subscribing for fifty copies; he has taken two hundred. . . . Madame la Marquise de Pompadour, to whom I had not even written about it, has taken fifty. . . . The Company of Farmers-general has subscribed for sixty. . . . &c. &c.—Letter to the Abbé d'Olivet, August 1761.

come and take his seat, and yet who presided, invisibly, at its deliberations.

From the first portions that were sent to the members, they were, not without reason, amazed at the rapid progress of the work. Its author had set himself to his task with incredible ardour; he could think or speak of nothing else. His letters of that year are full of it. He would have been less excited had he had to compose *Horace* and *Cinna*, instead of merely to comment on them. "I treat Corneille," he writes to the Count d'Argental,\* "sometimes as if he were a god, sometimes as if he were a coach-horse."

In the course of the following month, accordingly, we find d'Alembert writing to him: "The Academy has received your remarks on *Horace*, on *Cinna*, and on the *Cid*. We have been much pleased with your remarks on *Horace*, much less with those on *Cinna*, which seem to have been composed in haste. The remarks on the *Cid* are better, still they require revision. It appears to us that you insist too little on the author's beauties, and sometimes too much on faults which may not appear faults to everybody." Let us not forget that he who speaks thus is d'Alembert, the chief of the Voltairians at the Academy.

Voltaire yielded, or seemed to yield, to these criticisms. "The Academy," he wrote shortly afterwards to d'Argental, "puts its observations on the margin. I either correct, in consequence, or I dispute." And as his friend had some fears that he might dispute a little too much—"Let me proceed," he replies; "I will be modest, respectful, and not maladroit."

He was so, nevertheless, although this can hardly be said to have been one of his common faults. In those few passages in which he treats Corneille as a god, he lets it be seen

\* August 1761.

too well that he merely wanted to give himself a title to treat him elsewhere, to use his other expression, as a coach-horse; all that he gave him with one hand, he took back with the other. D'Alembert insisted. "Think well," said he, "that a living author, in criticizing a dead one who enjoys the public esteem, ought to be superabundantly in the right when he speaks at all; and to say nothing when he is only in the right. You see the reception that has been given to the poor creatures who have pointed out the foolish things found in Homer, and yet those poor devils had at least right and a half more on their side." Another day: "Don't condemn Corneille except when you are doubly in the right." Yet another day: "You think it was so bad, in your criticism on *Polyeucte*, that he should go and smash away at the altars and the idols. Don't you do as he did. . . . The public is a long-eared animal that feeds on thistles, that gradually gets a disrelish for them, but brays when it is deprived of them." Corneille, it will be seen, would have been little flattered with the defence. He would have begged of d'Alembert rather to abandon him to the unfriendly handling of Voltaire.

As for the respect and modesty promised to be shown by the latter to the Academy, he had been, as it would appear, still more wanting in these qualities than in address, for the Academy was about to be seriously angry with him. But he still required its aid; so he calmed it down with one of those humble letters which cost his pride nothing, sure as he always was to retrieve his loss at the expense of those who allowed themselves to be caught by his snares. "I beseech you," he would say to the perpetual secretary,\* "to prevail on the Academy to continue its kindnesses." But in another letter to d'Argental:† "The Academy does not want to appear philosophic. What poor observations are its observations on

\* Duolos.

† November 1761.

my remarks concerning *Polyeucte* ! Patience ; I am not the man to yield."

He did yield at last, just enough to keep the Academy from disowning his work ; and, in a subsequent edition,\* he restored to its original state all that he had been obliged to modify.

V.—Now let us hear what was said by a cotemporary, one of those few critics who had not been deterred from opening his mouth by the ascendancy of Voltaire. The following passage is from Clement, in his *Letters* to the author of the *Remarks* on Corneille :—

"The main duty of a commentator is to elucidate what is obscure in his author ; to bring the text into a state of the utmost possible correctness ; to bring out a hundred things which art conceals from the view of the unintelligent reader. He makes us perceive the boldness or the delicacy of certain images or certain expressions. . . . He justifies what may seem censurable in the eyes of half-connoisseurs. If there be a fault, he abandons it to its fate ; but does not seek to take advantage of it for the purpose of making a shameless attack on a celebrated poet, by favour of whom he is too happy to obtain a look from posterity."

This last hit goes too far. The author of *Mérope* and of *Zaire* had no need to write comments on *Cinna* in order to be himself somebody. But what goes before is good, and Voltaire had done, point by point, the contrary.

The first observation, which is instantly suggested on your opening the book, and, in some sort, before having even read any of these *Remarks*, is their smallness. Nothing better than brevity ; Voltaire often excelled in it. But on glancing at these altogether petty articles, one cannot avoid recalling

\* 1774.

the name of *great* that had been awarded to Corneille. We have but verses picked out here and there, phrases dissected as one would do in teaching a child grammar, or, at most, in giving boys lessons in composition; yet even then, one would introduce larger views, more literature and more logic. Voltaire looks only at the turns of expression and the words. One would fain say to him, "What need is there of all this? Nobody ever thought of going to Corneille for lessons in language and grammar. These incorrect expressions, and antiquated words and idioms, are seen by everybody that knows French as well as by you. Wherefore, in *Rodogune*,\* fifteen remarks on thirty lines? Wherefore, in that same piece,† forty-nine on a single scene?" One would say, that he wanted to overwhelm with mere number the man whom he had no chance of vanquishing in any other way. This prepossession against Corneille is manifest even in passages where he seems to relax his ardour. When we see him pass over instances of incorrectness more real and more serious than many that he notices, we are reminded of a man who has gathered in a hurry, and without selection, whatever he could find to toss at the head of an enemy.

Accordingly, even were all these innumerable remarks to be quite correct, we might still maintain that this is not commenting on Corneille. He who could paint with so bold a pencil, ought not to be studied with a magnifying glass. A Hercules should not be attacked, even although justly, with pin points.

But among these attacks with pin points, who could have patience enough to count how many are unjust? Who could even enumerate in how many ways they are unjust?

Sometimes he attributes to Corneille, without distinction, faults which are certainly his, and faults which are those only

\* Act ii. sc. 2.

† Act iii. sc. 4.



of his age; sometimes, exaggerating that same distinction between the age and the man, he attacks as antiquated what, on the contrary, was bold and new. Here there is a very clear passage which he would fain make out to be obscure; there, a passage a little less clear, and which might have been elucidated, but which the commentator hastens to declare unintelligible. He separates verses which should remain connected; he connects verses which should remain separate. Often if right in substance, still he is unjust in the form, whether it be that he exaggerates reproach or censures in an unjustifiable tone. In fine—and who could believe it were it not positively proved?—he had not even taken the trouble to procure a good edition of his author! He notices faults which Corneille himself had corrected, together with some which he had never committed, inasmuch as they were errors of the press; and all these criticisms missing fire, Voltaire nevertheless knowingly persisted in them—for they were pointed out to him.

As for negligence and inaccuracy, the instances are incredible.

“A woman,” he says, speaking of a verse in the *Polyeucte*, “ought to give people the impression that she is virtuous, but ought never to say, *my virtue*. See whether Monime, whom Mithridates wants to make his mistress, ever says, *my virtue*.”

Never? Why, twice. But the most curious thing is not that Voltaire committed this mistake; but that nobody in the Academy noticed it.

Would you have a stranger one still?

“*Si près de voir*,” says he,\* “is not French.” Here at once there is an error; *si près de voir* is French. But stay; he proceeds to justify what he has said. “*Près de* requires a substantive. One may say, *près de sa ruine*, *près d’être*

\* *Remarks on Horace*, Act i.

*ruiné.*" He does not see that *être* is a verb, and that he gives as an example of what is correct the very thing which he had blamed in his author!

The more general estimates he makes of his author, or those which he would have to be so, are full of literary heresies which he would have been the first to anathematize had he seen them in the writings of others.

Has he to speak, for example, of the imprecations of Camilla? "Never," says he, "did the woes of Camilla, or her death, cause the shedding of a tear. 'Would you *extort* (*arracher*) tears from me,' says Boileau,\* 'you must weep yourself.'"

Yes; but Boileau has nowhere said, that everything that is not of a kind to elicit tears should be banished from tragedy. There are powerful, tragic, universally admired situations enough that do not make us weep. Next, listen to his reasoning. "Camilla," he says, "ought not to be enraged against Rome; she ought to have waited till Rome or Alba should triumph." On this footing why not also say that Hermione does wrong in reproaching Orestes with the murder of Pyrrhus, since it was she who commanded him to do it? With this fine logic it is clear that there would no longer be in the world passions, or inconsistencies, or crimes; but it is clear, also, that there would no longer be such a thing as tragedy.

Voltaire goes so far as to blame, as contrary to the rules of the drama, the murder of Camilla by her brother. "Aristotle," he says, "has remarked, that the most uninteresting of catastrophes is that in which an atrocious deed is committed in cold blood." You would object to this, that Hora-

\* Boileau said:—

"Pour me tirer des pleurs."...

Here there is another inaccuracy which it is surprising that the Academy did not notice. Our classics, it would appear, were not very familiar to the literary men of that time.

tius was nowise in cold blood ; that his sister's imprecations were quite sufficient to lead, dramatically speaking, to a murder, which, besides, is a historical fact. But why offer any reply? Voltaire, on the next page, has forgotten his own observation. The very murder which he had blamed as committed *in cold blood*, he proceeds to say was committed *in a moment of passion*.

In all that bears on the contexture of the pieces, we find the same negligence, the same injustice. Sometimes he assumes as known what has not been told ; sometimes he assumes as unknown what has been formally told. With the improbabilities resulting from the observance of the unities—improbabilities to which a declared partisan of those rules forfeits at once all right to be severe—he often mingles what are not improbabilities at all, or which fall at least within the sphere of those general improbabilities to which we must of necessity consent, unless we would dispense with dramatical compositions altogether. In *Horace*, for example, it would be more *Roman*, strictly speaking, in the French and conventional meaning of that term, that the father should be present at the combat ; but it is not on that account improbable that he should not have been present, and Voltaire was wretchedly ill-inspired when he maintained that this improbability spoilt the whole for him, even to the famous *Qu'il mourût*.

"It is a piece of great folly," he had said, "to see nothing estimable in an enemy who enjoys the public esteem."

Hence those eulogiums which he accords—we have seen in what spirit—to the beauties of Corneille. But it is on the least apparent, sometimes indeed on the most questionable of these, that he prefers to dwell. Did he imagine that he should thus have the air of being so very impartial as to praise not only what everybody praises, but even what most people do not even notice? Here again we can perceive a

round-about way of injuring Corneille, for thus the reader is naturally led to ask what this man can really have been with respect to whom, in order to find matter to praise, one must seek out beauties of the second and third order.

Never, accordingly, did Voltaire forgive the man who was bold enough to expose this policy, that poor Clement whom he called Clement *Maraud*, to distinguish him, as he said, from Clement *Marot*. It is true that Clement went into the affair with no lukewarm feelings, and that Voltaire did not always get off by launching a pun at his head. In 1772, what excitement and rage at Ferney! Clement had published his *Last Word*; Clement was doomed to be crushed. Yet Voltaire did not wish to appear as if he thought himself at all touched; he wished to seem indignant only at what Clement had dared to say of his friends d'Alembert, Dorat, and Condorcet:—

“Folly I might not venture to unmask,  
Think d'Alembert a stiff affected fool,  
Dorat impertinent, Condorcet dull.”

This was what Voltaire considered an unheard-of enormity. He could not digest the insolence that could “insult by name two academicians of distinguished merit,” that impudent insult “uttered in public, by the son of a procurator, to a man like Dorat!” The son of Arouet, the notary, had uttered much worse against far worthier persons, and among others, more or less directly, against the great Corneille.

His remarks, indeed, had seemed hardly better to his friends than to his enemies. “The cry is general,” say Bachaumont’s\* *Secret Memoirs*, “against M. de Voltaire’s Corneille. . . . All is botched in that work. . . . No depth, no general views, no well-studied analysis.” Again:† “It is asserted that M. de Voltaire’s notes on Corneille are printing

\* April 1764.

† May 1764.

separately.... This news throws still more discredit on the work." Bachaumont seems to say that people might at least console themselves with the reading of the text, and that nobody would care for the reading of the notes alone.

But Voltaire was too sure of his age to be under any apprehension with respect to these transient fits of disloyalty. "On the appearance of every new work," wrote Grimm so early as 1756, "the public laughs at M. de Voltaire, says a great deal of ill of him personally, praises his previous works at the expense of the last, and ends with admiring it as it admired those that went before."

And thus it was with the *Remarks*. The author's friends soon resumed their courage; they praised that work all the more, the more need there was of praising it, to save it from being forgotten or despised. "The highest honour that Corneille could receive," wrote Condorcet, "was M. de Voltaire's condescending to write comments on him." The public did not, at bottom, subscribe to such eulogiums, but the *Remarks* had, in their very weakness, a great merit in the eyes of a shallow generation, the merit of confining criticism to details, discussing easy questions only, and dispensing with erudition. People thus came fast enough, if not to admire them, at least to be on good terms with them; and although nobody in our days would like to take them for models, few critics have ventured to say what they really thought of them.

## CHAPTER XVII.

- I.—The verse and prose controversy—The art of versifying is not poetry—Errors on this subject—Malherbe—Racine—Boileau—J. B. Rousseau—La Motte—Voltaire opposes him, and is only half in the right.
- II.—Voltaire's love of verse—How he made verses—The surmounting of difficulties is a small matter—Voltaire made a jest of it—Defects of his versification.
- III.—He would have verse capable of being turned into prose—This rule sometimes good, often bad—Examples—Another error with respect to metaphor.
- IV.—Whence did these errors arise?—Invasion of philosophism in art and the things of the heart—Voltaire is never seriously affected—He saw in everything the pleasant side or the dry side—The dead in churches—A mother and the epitaph on her son—Voltaire in the ode.
- V.—Love in tragedy—Why people kept to it so much in France—Habit and necessity—Voltaire did not seize the question in all its breadth.—VI.—Ridiculous amours—La Motte—Marivaux—Lagrange—Saurin—Châteaubrun—Cornelle—Why do we except Racine?—Crebillon—Voltaire's struggles.

WHEN La Motte, at the commencement of the century, began to cry down verse, Voltaire energetically defended it.

It was not from having had many reasons to offer. What answer could you give to a man who is not sensible of any difference between a verse, even a good one, and a line of prose, even when feeble?

Of that difference Voltaire was profoundly, perhaps too profoundly, sensible.

Is this to be said to his reproach? Can one be *too* sensible of the beauties of verse? Yes, if he goes so far as to consider mere verses to be poetry; if he has no comprehension of poetry without verse; if he comes to value verse less on its

own account than on account of the difficulty surmounted in making it.

That difficulty has its advantages. The struggle the author has to maintain with the measure and the rhyme, compels him to ransack his thoughts better, and to give more time and care to labour and art.

But art is not poetry. It was a great mistake in the seventeenth century to confound the two. Voltaire, on this point, was no more in the right than La Motte.

The error was of ancient date. Poetry had not been inaugurated in France, as it was in the Greece of antiquity or the Italy of the *renaissance*, by men of warm feelings and profound imagination—men to whom it was a necessity of their very existence. No Homer, no Dante, ever stamped it with the seal of his genius. It had come in careless and light-headed, playing with verse, and willing to be indebted to it for all its merit.

Nor did it change its spirit on becoming more regular and more serious; the more it owed to art, the more content was it to be and to remain an art. Malherbe had definitively impressed this character upon it; and, strange as it must appear, Malherbe, nevertheless, even while he sought his own glory in verse and by verse, neither liked nor appreciated verse. He felt a grudge towards it for the difficulty it cost him; he never so much as suspected that the vocation of a poet could have any higher range. "If our verse survive us," he said to Racine, "all the glory we can expect from it is, that people will say we have been two good arrangers of syllables. A good poet," he added, "is of no more use to the state than a good player at skittles." \*

With more respect for "the art of verse," and for themselves, his successors in the seventeenth century kept to the

\* *Historiettes de Tallemant de Reaux.*

same track. Racine would have been much astonished, Boileau much scandalized, had people come to speak to them about poetry without saying a word about verse. They had no power of comprehending, in these questions, the soul without the body. It was their own form of materialism.

All the more was it one of the forms of that of the eighteenth century.\* All the poets of the time, good or bad, confound versification and poetry, spirit and body.

Brossette, the commentator of Boileau, found in the *Ode to Fortune* an imitation of Lucretius, and pointed it out to the author. "It is true," replied Rousseau, "and you have rightly remarked that I had in my eye the passage, *Quo magis in dubiis*. And I confess, seeing you approve of the manner in which I have appropriated to myself the thought expressed by that ancient author, that I am better pleased than had I myself been the author of it, for this reason, that it is *the expression alone that makes the poet*, and not the thought, which belongs to the philosopher and to the orator as well as to him."

La Motte had expressed the same idea. "Poetry," he said, in his *Discourse on the Ode*, "differed at first from free and ordinary discourse only in the metrical arrangement of the words, which gratified the ear in proportion to the perfection to which it was carried. To this, ere long, fiction was super-added with figures—bold figures, I mean, and such as eloquence would not venture to employ. *This, I believe, is all that is essential to poetry.*" Thus he comes to see no merit in it beyond the difficulty surmounted, and then to show that that merit is a small matter, and that it were better to abandon it.

Voltaire, without attacking the principle, combats the con-

\* Batteaux, a critic too much forgotten, whom we have already had occasion to speak of with commendation, was the first to protest against this old error.



sequence. The principle, on the contrary, he fully sanctions; for he puts the surmounting of the difficulty in the first rank among the reasons to be alleged, in his opinion, in favour of poetry.

He could not endure, for example, that Fénelon's *Telemachus* should be called a poem. Perhaps he was in the right; but it is not enough to be in the right—one should get there by the right way. Now his argument was this, that prose is too easy, too much within the reach of everybody. "What does a poem in prose amount to," he would say,\* "but a confession of a man's incapacity?"

There have been people, no doubt, who wrote in prose because incapable of writing in verse; and, as Gilbert said,—

"It costs us some trouble our verses to polish,  
But in prose, at the least, one with ease may be foolish."

But this is not saying that verse is necessarily the form of poetry, any more than that the human body, admirable as it is, is necessarily the envelope of the human soul. "In taking away the difficulty," says Voltaire again, "M. de La Motte takes away the merit." Were that a good reason, the merit would necessarily be enhanced in proportion to the difficulties surmounted; and we should have to say with Boileau, that "a faultless sonnet is of itself worth a long poem," a conclusion which Voltaire would have admitted as little as we.

II.—But he entertained for verse all the fondness and enthusiasm which a true poet has for poetry; and besides, with a rare felicity in versification, he sported with all its difficulties.

"In reading Despréaux," d'Alembert wrote to him,† "one *concludes* and one *feels* what his verses must have cost him; in reading Racine, one *concludes*, but one does not *feel* this; in reading you, one neither *concludes* nor *feels* it."

\* *Discours aux Welches.*

† January 1770.

We, for our parts, *feel* that this looks very like a geometer; still these lines give no bad idea of what one experiences in reading the verse of Voltaire. "Despréaux," added d'Alembert, "to me appears to forge his with great skill—or, if you will, to work them very well on the turning-lathe; while Racine seems to throw them admirably into the mould; and you to create them."

He did, in fact, create them, although far less as an inspired person who finds, than as a skilful worker who succeeds at the first stroke, or at most at the second, in giving his work the utmost polish of which it is susceptible. He liked better to remake than to retouch, always happy to give himself this proof of his fertility of invention, still more happy when he could give proofs of it at the same time to others. He took delight in making it seem still more striking, by going over all those difficulties which were no difficulties to him; to these he recurs perhaps in fifty different passages in his works or correspondence. "It is easier," he says,\* "to write a hundred verses in any other language than four verses in French." "Know you not," he says elsewhere,† "that it is easier to write ten volumes of passable prose than ten good verses in that language, embarrassed with articles, unprovided with inversions, poor in poetical terms, barren of bold idioms, enslaved to the eternal monotony of rhyme, and yet wanting in rhymes when the subject is noble?"

Here there are as many eulogiums indirectly given to himself as there are words—eulogiums which one can hardly understand how he could give himself thus openly. He has exaggerated, moreover, and that very much. Less able poets have triumphed like him, in some respects better than he, over these several obstacles. Versification is a language which one may learn, like any other language, by dint of

\* Dedication to *Brutus*.

† *Discours aux Weiches*.

habit and practice; if all do not succeed in speaking it with equal elegance, all may learn to speak it with facility, and to be sensible of a few of its complications and trammels. A man, who was anything but a great poet, but who had composed a great many verses, said that he never recollected his having corrected a hiatus, seeing that he had never found one occur at the point of his pen. Thus it is, more or less, with all those material difficulties which have, no doubt, something alarming in them when seen at a distance. What more complicated, at first sight, than Latin verse? And yet we succeed in making Latin verses very rapidly—mediocre most frequently, yet as regular as those of Virgil.

The surmounting of the difficulties of verse is a small matter, then, in poetry; all the more as the very restraint is, in many respects, a preservative against the commission of faults, and a source of true merits. Voltaire was no less mistaken in what he adds on the relative facility of prose and verse. Bouffon exaggerated in the opposite direction, when he thought to praise verse by considering it "fine as prose;" but we will say that, if tolerable prose is more common than verse of the highest order, really good prose is rarer perhaps than good verse.

Passable or good, Voltaire wrote verse with a marvellous ease, which sometimes, if we are to believe Wagnière, his secretary, went even to improvisation. "One day Zaire was acted in his house, and he was Lusignan. At the moment of recognition, he burst into such a flood of tears that he forgot his part, and the prompter, who was weeping also, could not give him the reply." On this, he composed, on the spot, half a dozen verses, quite new, and very fine. "I was unfortunately unable," says Wagnière, "to write them out, any more than I could those he composed when acting the part of Zopire, in the scene with Mahomet, or those he added to

the part of Trissotin in the *Femmes Savantes*. The same thing occurred in many parts that I have seen him act. I saw him, also, after the acting of a play at Tournay, speak in verse for a considerable time to M. Marmontel, who, quite astonished, said nothing, and knew not how to reply. In the greatest heat of a conversation, or at a time when he seemed most engrossed with a game at chess, he would send for me to write down verses that he had been composing; and if I did not come instantly, he would run and write them down himself on the first scrap of paper that he could lay his hands upon."

One is surprised that with all this impetuous facility, Voltaire has had so generally, in his verses, a defect which one would rather associate with painful and tedious elaboration. Friends and foes alike find fault with him for not having the instinct of the period. His verses seem invariably made in pairs, or at most in fours. He has none of those dovetailings, those suspensions which have often been abused, but which, in a certain measure, are more necessary in French than in any other tongue. The Alexandrine lengthens itself out under his pen with all its good qualities, but at the same time with all its bad—correct and stiff, harmonious and monotonous. One regrets Racine, one regrets even Boileau, who was not always prevented by his incontestable dryness from attaining a fuller harmony. The versifier seems to be doing penance for the boldness and audacity of the thinker.

III.—Hence that heresy which we see him profess in the matter of verse, in many of his writings, and more particularly in his commentaries on Corneille. "In order to be good," says he,\* "verses should have the accuracy of prose. If you would judge how far they are bad, put them into prose, and

\* *Polyeucte*, Act I.

if that prose be incorrect, so also are the verses." "Let the reader," he says, further,\* "apply this remark to all the verses that dissatisfy him; let him turn these verses into prose; let him see if the meaning be clear, if it be true, if there be nothing too much or too little; and let him be sure that every verse that has not the clearness and precision of the most correct prose, is worthless."

How much truth is there in this? Just this. If a verse "dissatisfies you" without your being able to tell why, this process will help you to discover what is wrong. But to think of subjecting all verse to this experiment, is to misunderstand all the rights, all the privileges of poetry, and to risk your condemning thousands of good verses, in trying not to miss condemning a few bad ones. Not to speak of those bold images which figure so well in verse, and which would appear ridiculous as soon as taken out of their setting, how many expressions, how many peculiar turns to which prose could never accommodate itself, and which we should, even while admiring them, have to pronounce inadmissible! How many verses, unanimously pronounced beautiful and good, would give us a prose, not only incorrect, but barbarous, not only far from clear, but totally unintelligible! Look at these:—

"A captive, always sad, a burden life to me,  
Would you the love desire of fall'n Andromache?"

Nothing more poetical or more clear. Well, then, put it into prose. If, like Voltaire, you would have "nothing too much or too little," if you make it prose without adding anything, the words become unintelligible; if you add the words that are required, clearness returns, but then farewell to elegance. Some paintings are good, whatever the light in which you place them; but some also, and the greater number, require a particular light to be seen in. Would you lay it down as

\* *Nicomède*, Act iii.

a principle that before coming to a decision as to the worth of a painting, you must see how it looks in a bad light? Our verse, moreover, is full of phrases which inversion alone can make us accept as French. Take that away—which you must do in prose—and barbarisms remain. Often, too, the inversion separates words, the collocation of which will produce, if not faults in language, at least faults in taste, equally if not still more offensive. The more skilful the texture of the verse, the more do you spoil it by the slightest derangement. Instead of—

“Those titles, king of kings, chief of all Greeks beside,  
Still flatter’d of my heart the weakness full of pride,”

say: “Still flattered the weakness full of pride of my heart.” Not only is the poetical effect destroyed, but you have an image at once pretentious, rash, and disagreeable.

Accordingly, Voltaire is led on to announce another principle, more anti-poetical and more incorrect still.

“Every metaphor,” he says,\* “that does not form a true and sensible image is bad. This rule admits no exceptions.” And elsewhere,† “It has been said already that every metaphor, in order to its being good, ought to furnish a picture to a painter.”

This rule, like that of which we have just spoken, has something good in it. It may help us to see wherein a metaphor is faulty, which we at once reject by a spontaneous decision of our reason and our taste; but, when applied to all, it would lead us to blame a multitude which we admit, of which we are fond, and which, by that fondness, are sufficiently justified. It is one thing to be incapable of furnishing a picture to a painter, and quite another to furnish him with a monstrous or a ridiculous one. When a metaphor is in this latter predicament, let us condemn it; when it has no worse

\* *Heraclius*, Act I.

† *Nicomède*, Act III.

fault than that of being incapable of being transferred to canvas, it may be bad, but it may also be excellent. Racine is full of these last :—

“Already doth it seem to me these walls, those vaulted roofs  
Now fain would speak, and vent themselves in eloquent reproofs.”\*

“Come, then, and make those eyes of yours speak out in all our hearts.”†

“What ruins here of your resistance tell?”‡

Here is what, it seems, we must reject; for none would think of painting a wall in the act of speaking, or eyes speaking in people's hearts. Even in the case of the painting being possible, but ridiculous, still the metaphor might be good. Has not Boileau, for example, spoken of *an unvarnished tongue*? To paint a man with varnish on his tongue is at once capable of being done and perfectly absurd, and yet, in verse, there is nothing more in it than a very simple and a very happy figure. Corneille has many of this kind, and Voltaire makes them, in virtue of his rule, the unceasing objects of his mirth or his indignation.

IV.—But whence had he taken this rule, as well as the other? for we cannot admit that he held them with the sole view of damaging Corneille, or to enhance his own comparative worth, seeing that his poetry, being more correct, would suffer less from such a test. Whatever desire he may have had to depreciate a poet whom he did not like, he was not the man to attempt that in a manner which he knew to be destructive of poetry.

It must, accordingly, have been in his view something different from what we understand by poetry; the idea which he had formed of it, and the spirit in which he himself cultivated it, must have been more or less in accordance with the rules which he laid down for it.

\* *Phèdre*.

† *Andromaque*.

‡ *Iphigénie*.

There was here, consequently, but a new trait of the invasion of philosophical ideas in a quarter which ought to have remained exempt from their influence. We don't mean to say, however, that there are things in which there is no scope for a philosophical survey. Philosophy, in itself, is the mind, it is the heart, it is the taste, it is everything; and in this sense Corneille, Boileau, Racine, were philosophers as well as Voltaire. No one has the right to reclaim against the judgment of philosophy; but philosophy has a preliminary duty to fulfil: it is that of seeing well to the laws according to which, in each several case, it ought to form its judgment. This, at that time, it was incapable of doing. We have stated what the consequent results were in works of history; we now come to speak of what they were in poetry. People would not allow it to have its own rationale, laws, and philosophy. It was compelled to come down to that vast level which was extended over the past, and even projected over the future. Voltaire, in the excitement of acting, could weep when he heard fine verses rehearsed, even were they those of Corneille, whom he so abused; but ask of himself—you can do so in reading his correspondence—how he did this. You see him calculating, discussing, laughing. You will find that those exquisite pieces, which you can repeat by heart, and which you would feel so happy to be able to admire—not as fine verses only, but as the effusions of a soul profoundly affected—were composed quite in the same way as his lighter poems, quite in the same way as his pamphlets. At the representation of his *Œdipe*, it is said, he appeared on the scene holding up the tail of the robe of the high-priest. Is this a mere story? Possibly; but this, in any case, would be no bad emblem of what he was doing all his life. “Yesterday I was a philosopher, to-day I am Punchinello,” he said to Madame Suard, as he showed her a farce he was writing. But



the philosopher of the evening was always more or less the Punchinello of the next day. Whatever he might be writing, he was always laughing at it in his sleeve. He composed a tragedy as he would have designed, had he been a painter, the scenes, or as he would have arranged these between acts had he been a play-wright. Of serious emotion and genuine inspiration he had none. How could he have had any in a situation called up by fiction—he who, amid the realities of life, regarded all things in the light of the coldest reason? See him, for example, assail the ancient custom of burying the dead in the churches. He looks as if the thought had never crossed his head that it might have had a sentiment of piety for its origin. Evidently you would very much astonish him, you would make him burst into a prodigious fit of laughter, were you to say that there was something poetical and touching in the practice. It is unwholesome, it is absurd; and beyond that he cannot go.\* He promises himself, it is true, interment for his own bones in his chapel of Ferney; but this is not in order that he may be nearer to God—all he wants is to enrage the priests. “Ay, I am building a church; tell that consolatory news to the children of Israel. Let all the saints rejoice thereat. The wicked will say, no doubt, that I build this church in my parish in order to have the one thrown down that intercepted my view of a beautiful landscape, and that I might have a spacious avenue; but I let the impious say what they please, and provide for my own salvation.”† Let a mourning mother ask his advice about the epitaph for the son she has lost; listen to the tone in

\* It was the Archbishop of Toulouse, M. de Brienne, who was the first to yield, on this point, to the reclamations of Voltaire. He forbade, in 1775, burials in churches; and the Parliament of Toulouse passed an order to the same effect. People did not fail to say, that that body sought to regain the character it had lost by the punishment of Calas; and it is not impossible that this desire may have influenced its decision.

† Letter to Thiriot, August 1760.

which he proceeds to reply: "As your late son, Madam, was not in the service either of Cæsar or of Augustus, he does not require a Latin epitaph. . . . It is, besides, for the honour of the French language to have it employed in writing epitaphs. . . . I am sorry, Madam, to talk to you on a subject that renews your griefs. . . . But for an occupation which will occupy me for a whole year, I would come and weep along with you. I have had no word sent me about Madame de Pompadour's eye. . . . Adieu, Madam, preserve your eyesight. Neither you nor I as yet wear spectacles."\*

And this is the man who had excelled in describing maternal love. What a pendant this to *Méropé*!

Take him now, if you will, not in some small argumentative work, or in a familiar letter, but in the most elevated kind of writing, the ode. There, too, what pains does it cost him to sustain himself in those lofty regions, to which he has been borne up by an opening burst of enthusiasm! Most frequently he does not seem to have any solicitude about remaining there, and on the slightest occasion for coming down, down he comes. Instead of feeling, he judges; instead of a description, he gives you a dissertation: well, too, is it, if some grave and noble strophe does not point itself into an epigram or an insult, like a loud hiss in the midst of a symphony.

V.—One question, in which he often had reason to appeal to cold good sense, was that about love in the drama.

To what are we to trace, in the seventeenth century, while the imitation of Greece was carrying all before it in the drama, this perpetual employment of a passion never brought into play by the Greeks?

There was here, first of all, the influence of literature and the spirit of the time. Of all the passions, love alone people

\* Letter to the Countess of Lutzelbourg.

were capable of studying, or had any wish to study. Hence those interminable romances which furnished matter for all the conversations of the day; hence, also, in the drama, the obligation to adopt the tone and colouring of those romances.

On the other hand, it was the imitation itself of the Greeks which led, on this point, to a different course being followed from theirs. Having adopted the excessive simplicity of action which lay at the basis of the system, it was necessary that something should be found, by means of which the void thus created might be filled up. For, take from a Greek play what is not of a nature to figure on a modern scene, and see then to what you thus reduce it. "People are much mistaken," said Voltaire, with much reason, in one of his prefaces, "if they imagine that all those subjects, treated with such success in former times by Sophocles and by Euripides—the *Œdipus*, the *Philoctetes*, the *Electra*, the *Iphigenia in Tauris*—are happily chosen subjects, and easily managed. . . . They are subjects of one or two scenes at the most." Say, if you will, of one or two acts, but certainly that is all.

The same must necessarily be the case, with few exceptions, whenever a subject is treated in the Greek manner. You will have a few scenes; you will never have the five acts which use has demanded ever since the days of Horace,\* and before his time. Why five? is it asked. Is it not a conventional affair, a matter of caprice? No doubt; but what seems caprice is often a form of reason. It was thought desirable that a work like the drama should never be without a certain amplitude. The Greeks lengthened it out by means of choruses, of conversations—often repeated, but which gave life to the pomp of the scenes—and by a slow and chanted declamation. Starting from the same principles, but without

\* *Næve minor nœu sũ quinto productione actũ  
Fãbulã . . .*

these several resources, our classics had no means of lengthening out their pieces but by love intrigues. Voltaire was very proud of his achievement the first time that he dispensed with these; but at the same time, his *Death of Cæsar*, notwithstanding the fertility of the subject, has only three acts, and, in some sort, only one situation. Longepierre, who piqued himself on knowing how to dispense with love, got rid of it only at the cost of making his plays desperately tedious. When the English drama subjected itself to the laws of the French, it was subjected to the same necessity. Dryden's *Cortez* is a gallant knight, who falls in love with one of the Inca's daughters. Addison's *Cato* is not himself a lover, but the play is full of the loves of his daughter and an African king. "The custom of introducing love at random in dramatic works, passed from Paris to London," says Voltaire,\* "about the year 1660, along with our ribbons and our wigs." Yes, *along with*, but not in reality as a fashion. The ribbons and the wigs might have been dispensed with; but on the French system being once adopted in the drama, one could not dispense with that which alone could render the application of that system possible.

On this, therefore, as on many other questions, Voltaire was only right half-way. He should not have confined himself to merely showing how ridiculous it was to employ love intrigues in a certain number of subjects; he ought to have traced the evil to its source, and that source lay in the very constitution of the drama; he ought to have called for the enlargement of the canvas, in order that pictures of ampler size might make miniatures useless. "In order to make it worthy of the tragic drama," he says, in the dedication of *Brutus*, "it ought to be made the necessary business of the play, not lugged in merely to fill up a vacuity." An excellent

\* *Lettres Philosophiques.*

rule; but what purpose can it serve as long as the necessity for violating it continues?

VI.—It is true that this necessity having been once ascertained, people gave themselves up to it with a strange complacency.

In the *Machabées* of de La Motte, the youngest of the brothers falls in love with the favourite of Antiochus.

In the *Annibal* of Marivaux, would you know for what purpose the Carthaginian hero has come to the court of Prusias? It is to sue for the hand of that prince's daughter, and, as a matter of course, his rival is Flamininus, the ambassador of the Romans.

In the *Jugurtha* of Lagrange, it is a rivalry in love that arms the king against his brothers.

In the *Spartacus* of Saurin, the revolted slave falls in love with the daughter of Crassus, and even has his passion returned. The author takes care, it is true, to make him the son of a petty king of Asia.

In the *Philoctète* of Châteaubrun, the Greek hero is not alone at Lemnos. He has his daughter with him, and she is there, of course, only to be fallen in love with by Pyrrhus.

The form was often still more strange than the substance, and unfortunately Corneille had set the example. Amid the manliest inspirations he is ever throwing into his lovers' speeches whatever, in the conventional language of that passion, is most tame, most vapid, nay, did we not speak of Corneille, we should say, most silly. It has been said that he only yielded, in spite of himself, to the exigencies of the public opinion of his day. Are we quite sure of this? He seems rather to take pleasure in such jargon. None of his tragedies, not even his *Polyeucte*, is exempt from passages in which one would say that he wished rather to parody other plays than

to comply with the received tone. In *Pompée*, Cæsar wants only to lay down his laurels at Cleopatra's feet. Master of Rome and the world, he says :

" This glorious title which I truly have,  
Nobler I make by being your poor slave."...

In *Œdipe*, amid a population which the plague was decimating :

" Whatever multitudes the plague may slay,  
More dismal still—true lovers are away,"...

says Theseus. And Corneille has perhaps two hundred passages of the same kind.

Racine has few, almost none, at least in his principal plays. He was subject to the same necessity, but an elegant reserve, a purer taste, led him to dissemble his embarrassment. In him we no longer find the gross gallantry of romance ; no more has he those distilled fine speeches which the Hôtel de Rambouillet had the art of throwing into the subject. Love, in Racine, is always either a furious passion or a delicate sentiment. It is Phedra, it is Hermione, or it is Iphigenia, when forbidden to see Achilles again :

" Ye gentler gods ! my life ye only asked !"...

When he makes a Mithridates or a Nero breathe lovers' sighs, if he departs from historical probability, he remains truthful in his details. It is in vain for us to say that it is not thus that people speak ; we add in a whisper, that it is thus we should like to speak.

Crebillon, the *Terrible*, fell plump into the mawkishness of Corneille. To the examples we might adduce of loves out of place and ridiculous, we should have to add his Cataline in love with Cicero's daughter, and his Idomeneus, the rival of the son whom he has engaged to immolate. He has introduced love, and such love, even into his *Electre*, where filial and fraternal love so manifestly forbade the introduction of

any other. Agamemnon's daughter loves Itys, the son of Egistheus, and Orestes loves Iphianassa, the sister of Itys. The author, in his preface, makes an attempt to justify this. "Could a princess, it will be said, so cruelly situate as Electra was, be imagined to be in love? Yes, in love. What hearts are inaccessible to love? What situations can put one beyond the reach of a passion so involuntary? The more miserable we are, the more susceptible do our hearts become." He is right; but it is not thus that the case ought to be put. The question is not whether Electra could fall in love, which in point of fact is possible enough, but whether dramatic truth, rightly understood, permitted her being represented thus.

Master of the drama after Racine, Crebillon left nothing more to be done in giving the force of law to a custom which might have been supposed to be shaken by the manner in which Racine submitted to it. Voltaire wrote his *Œdipe* at first without introducing love, but the actors refused it. "That young man," said Dufresne, "would deserve as a punishment for his pride, that his play should be acted with that grand villanous scene translated from Sophocles." He did not throw out the *grand villanous scene*,\* and it went off not so badly; but he had to contrive a love intrigue in order to get himself forgiven. The *Mort de César*, written in 1735, was not played until 1743, when the success of *Mérope* had given confidence to the actors, yet, in spite of *Mérope*, it proved a failure. It required all Lekain's credit to get people prevailed upon to try it again, twenty years afterwards, and again it met with no success.

\* The first in the fourth Act.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

- I.—Actors in the eighteenth century—Encouraged and excommunicated—Adrienne Lecouvreur—Mademoiselle Clairon—The theatre among the Jesuits—Bishops at the theatre.
- II.—Embarrassment of the Government—Marriages—Molé—Piety among the actors—Funeral services of Crebillon and Rameau—Projects for raising the condition of the players—Prove failures—Honour among them—Fréron at Fort-l'Evêque—Actresses.
- III.—Influence of the theatrical material on dramatic theories—A score of planks and a score of candles—Spectators on the stage—Make way for the ghost!—Laughable magnificences—Augustus and his wig—Camille's gown with a train—A savage with his hair powdered white—The togas and tunics of Crebillon's senators.
- IV.—Declamation—Relics of the ancient turgidity—Verses chanted and noted—La Champmeslé—La Clairon—Revolution—Naturalness allied with the truth of costume—*Electre* at Versailles and at Ferney.—V.—All progress in a department of art is progress in the whole—Genius alone perceives the bearing of it beforehand—Voltaire made no use of the progressive improvements effected on the stage—The public gave him no encouragement to do so.

ONE word, since we have been led into the subject, on the influence which the actors exercised on the drama, and, indirectly, on the ideas of the time.

It was a most singular existence that of the actors and actresses in France. The Church, which condemned them, durst not ask the State to cease giving them encouragement; the State, which encouraged them, durst not ask the Church to cease condemning them.\* Pariahs as a class, they were

\* A person of the name of Huerne de la Motte had his name expunged from the roll of advocates, for having written a memoir against the excommunication of the players. The work was burnt by order of Parliament.



received even in the palace of the sovereign ; yet covered with laurels, glistening all over with gold, they remained pariahs. He to whose remains the Archbishop of Paris refused the rights of burial, was the man whom Louis XIV. so long admired and almost loved ; it was Molière. That woman whose mortal remains were in like manner refused admission into the common burying-ground, was one whom all France admired as one who lent new beauties even to Racine ; it was Adrienne Lecouvreur. "When the Italians and the English," wrote Voltaire on this occasion,\* "learn that we excommunicate persons who are in the pay of the king, that we condemn as impious a drama which is acted in convents, that we pronounce games to be dishonourable in which great princes have been actors, that we declare those plays to be works of the devil, which have passed under the censorship of the severest magistrates, and which have been acted before a virtuous queen,—what would you have them think of our nation, and how can they conceive either that our laws can give their sanction to an art declared to be so infamous, or that anybody should dare to put a mark of infamy on an art which has been sanctioned by our laws, recompensed by our sovereigns, and cultivated by our greatest men?" In 1765, Mademoiselle Clairon having been sent to prison for refusing to play : "It is too absurd a contradiction," he wrote again, "to be sent to Fort-l'Evêque if you do not play, and to be excommunicated if you do." By another oddity, as Italian players were not excommunicated in their own country, those of the *Comédie-Italienne* theatre in Paris were no more so, even when they happened to be Frenchmen. In fine—and this was worse than odd, it was monstrous—a wife could throw off the authority of her husband, and a daughter that of her father, by having themselves put on the

\* *Lettres Philosophiques.*

lists of the opera girls. This was one of the first abuses reformed by Louis XVI.

Although the plays that were acted in nunneries and in the Jesuit Colleges were in general very innocent, Voltaire's remark on this subject was not the less just. There was absurdity in condemning a thing, with a taste for which it was not thought improper to inspire the young, and in putting a mark of infamy on those who did the same things professionally, which others were taught to do for their amusement.

Besides, it was not in the religious boarding-establishments alone that theatrical representations were tolerated. Priests, nay, bishops attended without scruple the numerous small theatres of the *noblesse* and high finance officers; their dignity sometimes received on those occasions more than one untoward rub.

In 1769, M. de Jarente, Bishop of Orleans, happened to be with the Countess d'Ablimont. He was accosted by two young abbés. Minister of the portfolio, accustomed to bow to the door ten times more solicitors than he had livings to give away, he at first repelled them, but they said they were relations of the Duke de Choiseul, and the Duke, who was also there, addressed them as his cousins. Upon this, M. de Jarente promised not to forget them. A few moments afterwards the curtain rose, and the bishop was confounded at recognising his two abbés—in two actresses. All Paris came to know of it. It was turned into a farce, intitled, *The ballet of the Abbés*, and was played at all the private theatres. And M. de Jarente, at Orleans, refused, as others did, marriage and burial to players.

II.—Often had the Government endeavoured to put an end to these contradictions. A declaratory law of Louis XIII.,

16th April 1641, bore : " It is our desire that the exercise of the play-actors, which may innocently divert our people, that is to say, turn them away from various bad occupations, cannot be imputed to them as blame, or be prejudicial to their reputation in the public commerce." In 1688, the actor Floridor, born a noble, was by virtue of an *arrêt* of the Royal Council, allowed to retain his status as a member of the *noblesse*.

The Church, after so many anathemas, could not retrace her steps ; but the clergy sometimes lent themselves to certain evasions. Thus, when an actor at the *Comédie Française* wished to marry, he made a declaration to the effect, that he renounced the stage ; then, after the marriage was over, he received from the first gentleman of the chamber, superintendent of the Royal playhouses, an order to return to the stage. But in 1768, Molé having offered to make the usual declaration, the archbishop took up the matter seriously, and asked for a written engagement from the first gentleman not to recall the player. Thereupon there followed long debates, and at last the archbishop discovered that the marriage had taken place. It was found that he had been got to sign, among other papers, a warrant for marrying the great comedian. He suspended the priest who had blessed the marriage, and whose only fault had been his having given credit to the prelate's surreptitious signature.

The actors, on their side, eagerly seized occasions of throwing the clergy into embarrassment, either in soliciting favours which at bottom they cared very little about, or in making from time to time pious manifestations oddly contrasting with their position as excommunicated persons.

At the death of Crebillon, for example, they had a solemn service made for him in a church which had remained exempt from the archbishop's jurisdiction, that of St. John-de-Latran,

belonging to the Order of Malta. Hangings, dais, catafalque—all were there. Invitations were sent round by hundreds; the literary and the fashionable worlds were both present. The Academy sent a deputation. Not a playhouse in Paris, from the largest to the smallest, but sent its complement of players. "The procession to the offering," says Bachaumont's journal, "was conducted with the utmost regularity. The actresses appeared without rouge. Mademoiselle Clairon, in a long mantle, was chief mourner. Harlequin figured there also." On this, great was the wrath at the archbishop's palace, all the more as the *Gazette de France*, which was almost the official newspaper, "spoke highly," continues Bachaumont, "of the zeal and piety of the king's players." M. de Beaumont complained to the Order of Malta, and the Order, to gratify him, censured the priest. It was the players' turn, then, to get angry, and matters went so far that Mademoiselle Clairon had nearly prevailed on the principal ones, one and all, to retire. Two years afterwards,\* at the death of Rameau, the opera had a magnificent service performed for him at the church of the Fathers of the Oratoire; only the invitations were given in the name of his widow, and the clergy winked at it.

In 1766, much ado was made about the question of having the condition of the players raised, at least civilly. "Great projects are on foot," wrote Grimm, "for the benefit of the *Comédie Française*. People say that it is to be constituted the Royal Dramatic Academy, by letters-patent, registered in Parliament. It is not expected that by this formality the excommunication will be taken off, but the *status* of a member of that Academy will at least have its civil rights; and as, in virtue of their institution, the players form part of the king's household, it is said that the actors are to have the

\* 1764.

title of Valets of the king's household, and the actresses that of the Queen's household women.\* "The players maintained they had these titles already, in virtue of letters-patent issued by Louis XIII. The minister of the king's household, M. de Saint Florentin, laid this case before the council; but the king, who was for the *statu quo* in all things, cut the matter short by saying that he was no more to be spoken to about it.

So nothing was altered in the position of the players, and the year 1789 found them as before. They then obtained civil rights, but the clergy have more than once renewed their pretension to refuse them sepulture.

They showed great susceptibility, however, on the point of their honour, or what they called by that name. The Government was sometimes obliged to serve them against its own friends. In 1765, La Clairon made a complaint to the gentlemen of the chamber, threatening to retire from the stage, if they did not punish Fréron, who, she said, had insulted her in his journal. On this there came an order from the king, commanding Fréron to be imprisoned in Fort l'Evêque. But Fréron was ill; his friends begged that he might be forgiven. The reply was, that it was the actress that must ask that favour; and the actress was inexorable. The queen herself intervened; the actress reiterated her threat. "Mademoiselle," said the Duke de Choiseul to her, "we are, that is, you and I, on the stage, except that you choose your parts, and that you know how to get applauded, whereas I cannot choose mine, and am sure to be hissed. I remain, however, and, if you will believe me, you will remain too." But Fréron was by this time in prison, and there he was kept for a week. She too, shortly after this, for a matter which it would be tedious to relate, had to spend some days within the same prison-bars; but "her lodging,"

\* *Lit.*—Queen's chambermaids.—*Trans.*

says Bachaumont, "is magnificently furnished. The affluence of carriages is prodigious. The suppers she gives are numerous and divine; in a word, she lives there in the highest state." She had said on entering, that her person was entirely in the power of the king, but he could not touch her honour; to which, it was said, a police officer had replied: "Where there is nothing, the king loses his rights." Everybody was at heart of the same opinion with the policeman; but not the less did she remain the queen and the goddess of the day. Ten years afterwards, in honour of Mademoiselle Raucoux, so famous for her dissipated life and the number of lovers she had ruined, ladies of the strictest virtue wore bonnets à la *Raucoux*, representing a basket of open work.

### III.—But to return.

Inspiration, in a dramatic author, cannot be independent of the manner in which he knows that his work will be acted. Even without thinking of it, he will proportion his conceptions to the materials at his command.

Voltaire, therefore, rightly attributed to the niggardliness of the theatrical materials no small influence on the dramatic theories of the preceding century. "What further prevented," says he,\* "the acting from being truly tragic, was the construction of the playhouse and the paltry inadequacy of the scenery. Our playhouses, when compared with the Greek and Roman theatres, were what our markets, our *Place de Grève*, our small village wells, are to the aqueducts and fountains of Agrippa, the *Forum Trajani*, the Coliseum, and the capitol. . . . Mountebanks hired a tennis-court that they might have *Cinna* acted on a temporary scaffolding. . . . What could be done on a score of planks crowded with spectators?"

Figure now those twenty planks lighted up by twenty

\* On the various changes that the tragic art has undergone.

candles,\* covered, right and left, with a double, a triple row of seats, where the dandies of the day take their places, talking, laughing, giving themselves airs, and making all sorts of remarks. They have barely left a small open space in the middle. . . . And it is this small space which is to be, whether you will or no, a palace or a temple, or the plains of some remote empire ; it is in the midst of this moving circle that the imagination of the spectators must represent to itself Polyuctes alone in his prison, or lovers enjoying a *tête-à-tête*, or conspirators hatching a plot in the most profound secrecy. Then, however accustomed the players may have been, one may see how much the best acting must suffer from the intolerable annoyance of being so closely observed and having all probability so grossly outraged. When the playhouse was crowded, the players had not even room to pass ; the circle had to open at every entrance and exit. Mithridates, brought in dying, had been heard to whisper, "With your leave, gentlemen!" And the ghost of Ninus always caused a titter ever after a soldier, who was on duty behind the scenes, had called out in his simplicity, "Make way for the ghost!"† This state of matters lasted down to 1759. The stage had got more than twenty planks, and the candle had been replaced by an improved lamp ; but nowhere did old usages more tenaciously keep their ground. Regnard had before then, in his *Distrain*,‡ described those *petits-maîtres* who made an exhibition of themselves on the stage, laughing, flirting, and sometimes engrossing the whole attention of the spectators ; but in order to get rid of them a far higher influence was required than that of Regnard or even of Molière himself ;

\* The word *candles* (*chandelles*) survived this miserable lighting of the theatre and even pretty far on in the eighteenth century. At court it kept its ground down to the Revolution. When the king wanted light, it was a point of etiquette for him to say, not *des bougies* (wax-lights), but *des chandelles* (candles).

† *Semiramis*, Act iii.

‡ 1697.

Voltaire only could do it, and Voltaire too, backed by all the other revolutions that were then in progress.

Thus it was in tennis-courts and in barns, that the French tragedy had first displayed its pomps. The paltry appearance of the place was compensated by the laughable magnificence of the dresses. It was not enough to have all the heroes of Roman or Greek antiquity dressed out like French marquisses; to this disguise, which was absurd enough of itself, there were superadded all the ultra-refinements of bad taste. A king, whether a Nicomedes or an Attila, appeared invariably in white gloves with gold fringes, all the seams of his clothes laced over, glass diamonds on his sword; a warrior had the *tonnelet*, a kind of hoop fixed on under the waist and covered with a short petticoat. Attitudes and gestures corresponded to these masquerade habiliments. "In *Cinna*," says Voltaire,\* "Augustus was seen entering with the strut of a bully, covered with a square wig reaching to his waist. This wig was stuck over with laurel leaves and topped with a big hat, over which again nodded a double range of red feathers. He took his seat on an enormous arm-chair reached by two steps, while Maximus and Cinna seated themselves on two small stools."

Women had no less invariably the high powdered head-dress, the wide hoop, and gown with a long train, all then the fashion. On one occasion, during the acting of *Horace*, Duclos, who appeared as Camille, made a spring, after the imprecations, to get out; but her foot having caught her train, down she fell. Horace, who was running after her to kill her, raised her up, and supported her till they got behind the scenes, and then, resuming his part, he recommenced his pursuit, calling out,

"To hell, you wretch, there join your Curiaee!"

\* *Remarks on Cinna*, Act II.



Andrieux, with whom many of our cotemporaries were acquainted, had seen no inconsiderable relics of those absurd old scenes. "I have seen, in my younger days," he says,\* "Jocasta and Agrippina in wide hoops, sloped bodies, their hair drawn back to the nape of the neck, with square buckles behind the ears, the whole plastered over with pomatum and white powder. I have seen, in the tragedy of *Zuma*, a young savage petticoated with the *tonnelet* at his waist, a club in his hand, and his powdered hair falling loose over his shoulders. I have seen Ulysses and Theramenes, when they came to recite the close of *Iphigénie* and *Phèdre*, shake off the white powder from their hair."

If any attempt was made to bring the costume a little nearer to nature, even then it was set off with ornaments in the style of the old taste. This was the case, for example, at the representation of Crebillon's *Catiline*. To insure the success of the play, Madame de Pompadour took it into her head that she would present the players with new and magnificent dresses. "The cost has not been trifling," writes Collet in his *Journal*. "The senate alone comprised eighteen persons. The togas were of cloth of silver and the tunics of cloth of gold; the whole enriched with imitation diamonds." Togas of cloth of silver and tunics of cloth of gold! But then they were togas, and that of itself was a great step.

IV.—Meanwhile the declamation of the play remained very much what it had been made by Augustus's plumes and wig. Voltaire, who had pleaded for truthfulness of costume, did not, for some time after, perceive the importance of preserving a natural tone of voice. He himself recited with the turgidity of Corneille's actors. He delighted in prolonging the tones

\* Preface to Mademoiselle Clairon's *Memoirs*.

of his deep voice, and it always sounded—we have heard this from one who had been present—as if he were trying to frighten children.

Molière\* had laughed at the bombastic players of the *Hôtel de Bourgogne*. Baron, who had been formed by Molière, used to say that players should *recite* not *declaim*; but as at the same time he piqued himself on having an extraordinary dignity of manner and words, which he preserved in ordinary life and in doing the most ordinary things, even he declaimed far more than he recited.

Bombast, however, had diminished, but the singing was ever more and more sensible, so that the intonations could be noted like music. Racine, who had the credit of having given excellent lessons in speaking naturally to Champmeslé, noted the verses for her. One of the musicians of the *Comédie Française* amused himself with noting, during the acting, the long passages (*tirades*) of Mademoiselle Clairon, and he showed, to the praise of that celebrated actress, that he had noted four several times the same passage in *Alzire*, at four different representations, without there being the difference of a single note. This was a proof, in fact, of the profound study which it must have cost her before attaining such correctness; but that very merit was the proof of a great defect.

Marmontel largely contributed, if we are to believe him, to bring about that happy revolution which still remained unaccomplished. If we are to believe him, we say; for Mademoiselle Clairon's *Memoirs* do not agree on this point with his own. While thanking him for the praises he had lavished on her in the *Encyclopédie*,† she does not say that he had helped her to deserve them.

He had come to see, then, he says, that the reform of tone and gesture should be preceded by that of costume, and this

\* In the *Impromptu de Versailles*.

† Art. *Declamation*.

he never ceased pressing on Mademoiselle Clairon. Possessing much taste herself, and already convinced at heart, she resisted for a long time. Traditions are more imperious than laws. She had not the courage to throw off the yoke of settled custom; and, besides, she was not sure that her talents, formed under the old method, might not lose by the change. "But I saw her all at once," he adds,\* "return to my opinion. She was to appear as Roxana at the Versailles theatre. I went to see her at her toilette, and for the first time I found her dressed as a Sultana, without hoop, her arms half uncovered, and in the true oriental costume. I complimented her on her appearance. 'You will be sure,' she said, 'to be pleased with me; I have made a trial of that simple declamation which you have so pressed me to adopt. It had the greatest success. I am going to try it again here. If it succeed, farewell to the old declamation.' The result exceeded both her expectation and mine. It was no longer the actress, it was Roxana herself that people thought they saw and heard. People asked themselves, Where are we? The like had never been heard of. I saw her again when the play was over; I wished to speak about her success. 'Eh! don't you see,' said she, 'that I shall be ruined? The truth of the declamation is essentially connected with that of the dress. My present wardrobe is from this moment useless. I lose to the amount of ten thousand crowns' worth of garments. You will see me in ten days act *Electre* in the natural style, as you have seen me act Roxana.' It was Crebillon's *Electre*. Instead of the ridiculous hoop and the large mourning gown in which she used to be seen in that part, she appeared in the simple dress of a slave. She was admirable in it. Some time afterwards she appeared still more sublime in the *Electre* of Voltaire. That part which Voltaire had made her declaim

\* *Memoire*, Book v.

to him with a continuous and monotonous declamation, acquired, when spoken more naturally, a beauty unknown before even to him, for on hearing it thus played one day on his stage at Ferney, he exclaimed, while bathed in tears, 'It is not I who have done it; it is she!'

V.—What are we to conclude from this? for it is not as a mere anecdote that we have wished to introduce it.

It is one proof among many others, that in literature and in art, all is of a piece. Truth cannot insinuate itself into a corner of their empire without having a tendency to invade the whole; what is false cannot prevail at one point without prevailing likewise at others.

There is no reform, accordingly, no advance, however minute it may seem, which may not influence the developments of a whole age; but it is genius only that can perceive the bearing of these beforehand, and rightly appreciate the results that may be hoped or feared from them. In guessing the connexion betwixt declamation and costume, Marmontel made one step in advance; but that this consideration should lead to the modification of tragedy itself, is what neither he, nor Voltaire, nor indeed any one, was as yet in a condition to perceive.

This revolution, consequently, did not go beyond outward forms. The players spoke more simply; the authors preserved the old language and the old rules. The stage was disencumbered of the spectators that thronged it; but we have seen already how very little Voltaire, who had so often assailed those "powdered wigs" so ridiculously seated round Romans and Greeks, availed himself of the space thus cleared for him. The characters in the play could converse more at large; but the play itself, in spite of what even he had said of it, remained "a conversation in verse." He had not the

courage to bring it back to that *verisimilitude* which was far more important than that of declamation and costume—the verisimilitude of nature and history.

The public, besides, gave him no encouragement to do so. It showed a disposition to rebel against the most innocent innovations. “My *Adelaide*,”\* he says, “was hissed from the first act. The hisses were redoubled at the second, when the Duke de Nemours was seen brought in wounded, and with his arm in a sling. It was much worse when, at the fifth act, the signal ordered by the Duke de Vendôme was heard.” That signal was the firing off of a cannon in the distance, announcing the death of the Duke de Nemours. Nothing in all this, surely, is unfitted for theatrical effect. But it was new; people therefore hissed. Very true, the public was always asking something new, *were there no more to be had in the world*; but it was necessary that it should be had without going beyond the old circle of ideas.

\* *Adelaide du Guesclin*, 1734.—Repeated in 1765.

## CHAPTER XIX.

- I.—Dramatic authors in the eighteenth century—Their successes and their failures—Caprices and despotism of the public—Anguish—Ecstasy—Despair.
- II.—Voltaire philosophical enough in his failures—His being exposed to the beasts—His respect for the decisions of the public—Touching and re-touching—*Tancrède*—*The Orphelin de la Chine*—*Olympie*.
- III.—Haughty negligence of many authors of the present day—The encouragements they receive—Money in literature—It played a very inferior part in the eighteenth century—The small profits to be expected—The fewness of the reading, and still more of the buying public—Dearthness of books—The *Encyclopédie*—The publishers got all the profit—Let our authors give us at least their work for our money.—IV.—Excuses sought for—Excessive slowness of former times—Malherbe—Boileau—Racine—*Quousque tandem, Catilina!*—One instance of success lasted for ever.—V.—Did Voltaire really work as much as he is believed to have done?—Calculation—His shallowness, a symbol of that of his age.

THE position of dramatic authors was, in some respects, as singular as was that of the players. At once lofty and low, powerful and feeble, lording it over opinion and subject to all its caprices, it was either an object of envy or it was an object of pity.

These remarks, it will be said, apply to all times. An author hissed is always pitied; an author applauded is always envied.

True; but neither the successes nor the failures of our times, can give one an idea of what was then involved in a man's success or failure.

First of all, as we have already seen, the absence of more serious interests gave to theatrical affairs an exaggerated and immense importance. Look at all the memoirs of the time.

During such or such a month, such or such a year, one would hardly suspect that France had anything else to do but to see plays acted or to act plays. There were reckoned at Paris in 1760, nearly a *hundred* private theatres, and there was no social circle in which, without having a theatre, plays were not acted. Even the common people engaged in it; witness that shoemaker, who, in acting we know not what character, having had on one occasion to take a dagger from an altar, found himself unconsciously armed with his own paring-knife, which some wag had substituted for the dagger.

In this universal fever, if the successes made a great noise, the failures were terrible. A man that was hissed, was a man annihilated. To think that there was still something tolerable in a play that had failed, was an act of courage of which the most devoted friend was not always capable, and there was hardly any medium between success and failure.

Now, it was impossible to know, not a day, not even an hour before, what was to be the fate of the play. Precautions, protections, nothing was sure, and what seemed the best founded hopes were often followed by the worst failures. In 1752, the friends of Marmontel made so sure of the success of his *Héraclides*, that the financier, La Popelinière, had prepared for him an ovation in his château. Thither he went, in fact, with death in his soul, for the play had fallen flat to the ground. La Popelinière, in total ignorance of this, had not countermanded his feast, and the hissed author was received by a troop of shepherdesses, who presented him with a laurel crown.

A play might reach the fifth act without the public having pronounced, without showing symptoms of being prepared to pronounce, and often, in fact, without its having any leaning either for or against the play. But as custom required that,

before separating, the spectators should settle its fate, no more was wanted, at that last moment, than any circumstance, however slight—a verse, a word, a nothing—to make the multitude determine one or other way, so as to overwhelm the author either with condemnation or applause. It was universal suffrage preluding, on the playhouse benches, to those more serious caprices of which it is now giving us the spectacle. The mob became intoxicated with this sovereignty of an evening. It seemed to fear lest its right might not be sufficiently vindicated, if it was not exercised with the suddenness of tyranny. Hence those frightful throes which Piron has so admirably portrayed,\* and which Marmontel has described with still more graphic effect.† “In those days,” says he, “the author of a new play had set apart for himself and his friends a small barred box, in the third tier, over the proscenium, the seat in which, I may truly say, was like a bundle of thorns. I repaired to it half an hour before the rise of the curtain, and, till then, preserved sufficient fortitude amid my fears. But at the noise made by the curtain as it rose, my blood froze in my veins. In vain they tried to revive me with *liqueurs*; I swooned quite away. It was only at the end of the first monologue, at the noise of the plaudits, that I regained my consciousness. From that moment all went on well, and from better to better, until there came the passage in the fourth act with which I had been so threatened.‡ But as that moment approached, I was seized with such a fit of trembling, that, without exaggeration, my teeth chattered in my mouth. Were the great revolutions that take place in the soul and in the senses, mortal, I should have died from that which took place within me when—at the happy violence done to the spectators by the sublime Clairon in pronoun-

\* *Méromantic*, Act v. Scene 1.

† *Mémoires*, Book iii.

‡ The play to which he refers is *Dionysius the Tyrant*, his first piece: 1748.



cing the verse : 'Go, then, fear nothing,' &c.,—the whole playhouse shook with redoubled applause. Never from a more sensible fear did one pass to so sudden and sensible a joy ; and, during all that remained of the play, this latter feeling agitated my heart and soul with such violence, that I could breathe only in sobs." But, likewise, the most brilliant prospect that his fancy could anticipate in case of success, was exceeded by the reality. "In a single day, I had almost said, in a moment, I found myself at once rich and celebrated."

Hence, too, sometimes, after an unfavourable verdict, the despair of an author was more comical or more tragical, as the case might be, than anything in the play that had occasioned it. Sometimes, in printing it, half arrogant, half humble, the author tried to prove, in the preface, how the public ought not to have hissed ; sometimes he would reclaim, in full theatre, like that M. Morand, who in justification of the part of a mother-in-law, which the public had thought ludicrously overdone, darted upon the stage, declaring that he had painted after nature, that that mother-in-law was his own mother-in-law, and that if faulty in any way, it was rather in having softened down the traits than in having exaggerated them. The spectators laughed : he was furious. They only laughed the more ; on which he tossed his hat into the pit, calling out that he would fight the first that took it up.

II.—Voltaire rarely had occasion to experience those mental throes endured by Marmontel and so many others. He could make more sure of the public, which he held by so many threads ; and if, on one occasion, he apostrophized it in full theatre, it was to exclaim,—after the applause had begun, however, "Well done, Athenians ! it is from Sophocles !"

Then, if he never had to experience failures properly so called, he took philosophically enough his share in those half failures which any other man, equally accustomed to success, would have considered as thorough failures. Never—and it is incontestably one of the fair sides of his character—never do you find him put out of temper by a check which affected nothing but his vanity. People who, in philosophy, refused to relish his opinions, he treated as men of weak minds; those who contested his views, he overwhelmed with his sarcasms; but to those who confined themselves to attaching no great value to this or that production of his pen, viewed merely as a literary work, he never bore much ill-will. Perhaps we shall find him say, when preparing some new piece, that he is about “to be exposed to the wild beasts;” but he respects these very beasts, if not as infallible judges, at least as judges who kept quite within their rights, when they yawned at his long speeches, or thought themselves bound to hiss them. Sometimes, even, he simply acquiesced. In his correspondence, for example, one is surprised to see him, in many places, so docile; so that one is almost tempted to suppose that he is in jest. But no, he is not in jest. He has accepted the verdict; he hastens to correct, if he can, the faults which gave occasion to it. We do not see him give the public those arrogant lectures of which we have seen such curious examples in our own day. As a thinker, he would hardly permit people to think otherwise than he thought; as a dramatic author it was in all sincerity that he called himself the servant of the public.

But into what a fever, on some occasions, was he thrown by his eagerness to serve it! From day to day he would turn a play topsy-turvy, and it often required the intervention of the first gentlemen of the chamber to compel the poor players to study the altered lines, which perhaps were to be

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altered again. He had acquired this habit in Paris, and kept it wherever he went. It became quite a mania, and a wit could say, speaking of the *Orphelin de la Chine*, that there were three plays of that name, that which they were playing in Paris, that which was on its way thither, and which they would be acting in a few days, and that which the author was retouching at the *Délices*, with the view of sending it off next day. He tormented himself with the thought that what they were then acting in Paris, and what was on its way thither, were neither of them truly his play, such as he had finally arranged it; he trembled lest, amid all these various readings, the players should rather take what suited themselves than what he had, or believed that he had, definitively adopted. "I beseech you pressing, Mademoiselle, to take special care to preserve these two lines.... I ask your pardon also for these.... I cannot conceive how one could have taken away that line from your part.... I ask your pardon for all these details."\* Great also was his torture when his plays were printed too soon, and given to the public with lines which he had wanted to be left out. "I am suffering from more than one tribulation. Prault has printed *Tancrède*. Not only has he not printed it as I had written it, but neither Prault nor Lekain, nor Mademoiselle Clairon, who have made so much by it, have deigned to put me in possession of a copy. The play is very much altered, and in a manner which, it is said, covers me with shame."† Prault, the publisher, could have desired nothing better than to give a good edition; but what was he to take it from? Each time it was acted, it was a different play. Some authors send their printers a rough copy, and make their alterations on the proofs. Voltaire did worse. He sent the rough copy to the players, and it was after public experiments that he set himself to give that form to the

\* Letter to Mademoiselle Clairon in 1755.

† Letter to D'Argental, March 1761.

piece which he meant that it should preserve. "I have taken from the ills that overwhelm me, from the sleep which I hardly know," he wrote to D'Argental, on the occasion of this same *Orphelin*,\* "a little time for a hasty correction, and for rounding it off to the best of my power." And this task he was perpetually recommencing. He called the five acts his five baboons. He compared himself to a Chinese worker in porcelain, baking and rebaking his little figures, varnishing them, gilding them, always thinking to have done and yet always setting himself to work again.

All this is, no doubt, a little ridiculous; but febrile and puerile as it may be, one loves, nevertheless, this eagerness to do a thing well—this zeal animating a man at once ardent and calm, who is burning at the first line to get to the last, in order to have the play acted as soon as possible, yet who, for all that, does not forget the serious duty he owes to art. If wrong in collecting a crowd about an unfinished sketch, at least he is seen to spare neither time nor trouble in order that the sketch may become a perfect work. "It is the work of six days," he writes to a friend on sending him *Olympie*.† "The author should not have rested on the seventh," was his friend's reply. "He has repented therefore of his work," he rejoined; and, in fact, he reconstructed it from beginning to end. Thus, with all his haste, he did not look on himself as wanting in respect for the public. It is rather a homage that he renders to it, for he invites it to share in his work; he seems to acknowledge that he requires its aid in order to attain to something with which posterity will be satisfied.

III.—This is very far, indeed, from being to be imitated. Racine was much wiser and much more respectful when he kept his works in his portfolio and in his heart until he had

\* September 1755.

† 1764.

given them all the perfection of which they were susceptible. But between the fever of Voltaire and the impudent haste of certain authors of the present day,—who would hesitate to absolve Voltaire rather than them? One is pained to see serious critics granting with such levity those absolutions to genius which mediocrity applies to itself, those untoward encouragements to negligence and pride. Nodier will pardon those faults which “the poet,” he says, “seems to throw from his car to the crowd in expiation of his genius.” Sainte-Beuve willingly compares these faults “to the numerous ears of corn which the wealthy reaper, when the heat is most intense, suffers to drop from some ill-bound sheaf, in order that indigence may have something to glean after him, and to console itself the more.” Thus, of what would we complain? These faults which we notice, are so many alms which genius desires to present to our vanity. Anon there will no longer be any reason for the author who gives us most of these singular alms not being reputed the richest in inspiration, in true talent; and indeed, this is a conclusion which more than one author has been abundantly willing to adopt on his own account. “I am unequal, irregular, incorrect; I advance by leaps and bounds; the critics note my faults by thousands. . . . So then I must needs be a man of genius.”

A rough sketch, in painting, may have its value; but what should we say of a painter, whatever his reputation, who should make and sell such sketches only? What we should consider intolerable in a painter, is thought, by certain prose writers and poets, quite allowable in them; and, what is perhaps a still more untoward symptom of a general decline in sound criticism and taste, there is a public that tolerates and encourages this traffic; and while the sketches of a painter are never paid for at least as finished productions are, who knows not the enormous sums that are currently paid for those em-

bryotic bad books? Such an author, still a youth, has already made more money than all the writers in Paris a century ago made in ten years; for amid the turpitudes with which that epoch abounded, we must at least do it this justice, that money played, in the literary world, an obscure and hardly perceptible part. An author courted concealment in taking payment for a book, like a master who dreads being paid in the presence of his pupils, or as a preacher would blush to be paid the price of his sermon on coming down from the pulpit.

There were no large profits, besides, ever to be had. Notwithstanding the immense part played by books in the eighteenth century, we must not figure to ourselves a circulation, as at the present day, of ten thousand or a hundred thousand. The time was not then long past when Barbin said to Boileau, "Your *Lutrin* is going off. We shall dispose of at least five hundred copies." The possessors of libraries were almost the only purchasers; the reading public was far from numerous. "You know," says Voltaire, writing in 1765, "what I mean by the public. It is not the *universe*, as we paper-blotters have sometimes called it. The public concerned about books numbers forty or fifty persons if the book is serious, four or five hundred when it is pleasant reading, and about eleven or twelve hundred if it be a play." Voltaire was out of temper on that occasion, and we must not take his figures strictly as they stand; but we find more positive information elsewhere. For his *Corneille* with notes, for example, notwithstanding the noise made about it, and the attraction of a good work, he durst not reckon on more than two thousand subscribers, and he had not so many. How many is it supposed the *Encyclopédie* had? Barely three thousand, and this Grimm called a *prodigious* success.\* That number afterwards rose to four thousand, and all the friends of the work spoke of it with

\* *Correspondence.* September 1754.

immense pride. The three thousand subscribers to Addison's *Spectator* appeared the *ne plus ultra* of a book's popularity. A long time afterwards, that he might give an idea of the intellectual and political activity of the English, "The single city of London," said Voltaire,\* "has more than twelve gazettes in the week." A host of people, in fine, never thought of opening books properly so called, and many could have replied, like the Hector of the *Joueur*,

"In my day I have read but the almanacs only;"

for the almanacs occupied a large space in the book-world of those times. For some years efforts had been made to bring out a great many; but it was long before the number of seventy-two was reached, and that was in 1764.

Another reason for the sale of books being so much restricted, was their being so dear; and they were so from the very circumstance of the sale being so small, a smaller number of copies being consequently thrown off. The printing was slow and costly. Finally, however little bold the book might be in its opinions, the whole edition might be interdicted and confiscated; and it was natural for the publisher to take compensation in pretty large profits, for the risks of being ruined with which he was beset. The *Encyclopédie*, for example, cost the subscribers more than a louis the volume, and the profit of the publishers exceeded two million and a half livres;† but they had been repeatedly on the point of losing all.

In this state of things, most authors were happy to find a publisher willing to print a work at his own risk. Those who might have sold their works, often made it a point of honour to give them for nothing. Voltaire, once that he

\* *Philosophical Dictionary*.

† 2,630,393 livres. The printing had cost 1,158,958.—(Extract from a memoir, produced in 1769, in the lawsuit raised against the publishers by L'neau de Boisgermain.)

became a rich man, would have blushed to make money by his pen. Literary work, besides, was not regarded, in any case, as of a nature to be largely paid. In working for the *Encyclopédie*, for example, Diderot, in return for the enormous proportion of his joint labour, and for a responsibility which might any day have cost him ten years' imprisonment in the Bastille, received twelve hundred livres a year.

The very smallness of the profits to be looked for, contributed, no doubt, to the contempt entertained for pecuniary considerations. Our authors are exposed, on this point, to temptations which it would be unjust not to take into account in passing judgment on their misdeeds. Ask them not—for such modesty is quite out of date—to skulk out of sight when paid for their work, but let them at least have the modesty to give us something for our money. We will not even ask whether the work, in itself, is worth the price that the publisher has paid for it; but what we are entitled to ask—nay, to insist upon—is, that the author shall have given the necessary time; that he shall have done his best; that, in fine, he shall have laboured—can that be too much?—as the workman does, who considers himself as in duty bound to earn his wages.

Talent is like riches. We cannot all be rich; but all, whether rich or poor, may be, and ought to be, honest. Probity, in an author, is the care with which he composes his works—a probity, with which talent and fame ought no more to enable a man to dispense, than all the treasures of the earth could enable him to dispense with common honesty.

But this is what some would fain affect not to understand. Success is made to justify everything. No sooner does a book command a sale, than the author is quite absolved from any blame in having bestowed neither time nor pains upon it. He is like the unscrupulous manufacturer, who is blamed when his goods hang on his hand, and absolved when they



sell; or the smuggler, who does not consider himself as a dishonest man, because, instead of defrauding an individual, he defrauds everybody.

IV.—An excuse for these disorders has been sought in the necessity for breaking with the old school, which smothered the inspirations of genius under the pressure of toil. Thus is a poet not only allowed, but is even asked, to leave his verse in all its native roughness, all the incorrectness it must have when first thrown off. In the times of the Roman decline, people were found who had become so tired of the over-refinements of cookery as to ask for live fish, which they themselves cooked on their plates. With us it is poetry which we would have—not fresh, but palpitating. And whereas no reproach was more dreaded of old than that of having worked too fast—now-a-days, it is by hasty writing, by openly boasting of it, by declaring that here the reader has the ideas that first rushed into the author's soul—it is by this, we say, that most admirers are to be had.

Nothing more favourable, evidently, to indolence and empiricism; nothing better fitted to throw young people into the too common blunder of mistaking facility for talent, and supposing all enthusiasm to be that of genius.

But it is not with the present and the future, it is with the past that we have here to be occupied.

Now, however dangerous the shameless haste of the present day may appear, we cannot but feel astonished at the slowness of former times. One is tempted to ask, how authors by profession, and men of talent, encouraged, moreover, by success, could write so little.

We shall not go back to Malherbe, who maintained, that after writing a poem of a hundred lines, one ought to repose for a year. Tallemant's *Historiettes* give some curious de-

tails on the sluggishness of the father of French poetry, or rather of French versification. A friend, who had lost his wife, asked him to write some verses on this calamity, and by the time they were made, his friend had married again.

The seventeenth and the eighteenth century saw many authors who never wrote more than a single volume all their lives. The greater number, shall we be told, did well in keeping to that? No doubt; but there were some, too, whom posterity would have been happy to greet with a heavier baggage.

Look at Boileau. Some have amused themselves with calculating how many lines of verse he wrote. From 1660 to 1670, a little more than two thousand; from 1670 to 1680, a little more than three thousand; from 1680 to 1690, none; from 1690 to 1700, less than a thousand; from 1700 to 1705, eight or nine hundred. This gives a total of seven thousand, spread over forty-five years; being about two days and a half for each line. In his most fertile period (1670 to 1680), you have not a line a day; and when, after ten years' intermission, he begins to rhyme again, we find four days for every line he produced.

Look at Racine. He composed not quite so sluggishly, and he composed more; yet how small the number is for so long a career! How many years without producing any! How little eagerness to gather new laurels! But for Madame de Maintenon, who made him write *Esther* and *Athalie*, the silence he had maintained since writing *Phèdre* would have been prolonged, to all appearance, to the day of his death; and he had not completed his thirty-eighth year when *Phèdre* was acted!

Look, after him, at Crebillon. In his life, nine plays embrace a period of more than fifty years, twenty-two of which elapsed between the seventh and the eighth, which he was always announcing, yet which was never ready—*Catiline*. "*Quous-*

*que tandem, Catilina!*" said the wits. But he proceeded none the faster, and he was near eighty when he made up his mind to give it to the world.

This want of eagerness to make the most of glory once acquired, may be explained likewise, in part, by the eagerness of the public to keep that glory in its remembrance. Had Crebillon seen himself in any danger of being forgotten, it is to be believed that he would not have set himself so much at his ease. Once in possession of a certain renown, an author was sure of preserving it as long as he did not compromise it by producing some inferior work; he had no need, as at the present day, to be perpetually reviving a remembrance which so many engrossing occupations are ever tending to efface. No man, now-a-days, can repose upon his laurels; no man, at least, without a prodigious effort of philosophical indifference, can voluntarily remain in that obscurity, in which every man who does not keep his admirers in exercise speedily disappears. In former days, a single instance of success lasted for a lifetime. Had you done no more than write a single sonnet, you were to the end of your days, and in the eye of everybody, the author of that sonnet—a wit, a poet. Now-a-days, one no longer says, "He wrote this or that;" but one asks, "What is he doing?" And however short the time during which this question may have been asked without getting an answer, people cease to put it any more. We know in France but one exception, that of M. Xavier de Maistre, who has become and remained celebrated in consequence of having written three or four small works; moreover, it is probable that his social position has contributed not a little to this result. Whoever does not increase, decreases. The activity of authors must keep pace with the activity of the age. The old palm branches of success wither up in the hands of those who are not always gathering them afresh.

V.—The eighteenth century was already, on this point, remote from the seventeenth; but less perhaps than one would imagine. The fever was rather without than within; there was more movement than work, more noise than serious agitation. The public was not really exacting. The smallest services once rendered were willingly remembered by the philosophical world, and that world included almost everybody. The slightest titles to glory preserved themselves intact almost indefinitely.

There was, we say, more movement than work. On this point, too, as in every other thing, Voltaire was the type of his age.

This may appear a paradox. Voltaire is supposed to have worked enormously. Sixty or seventy volumes, according to the editions, seem to put this beyond dispute. Then, it will be said, see his correspondence. Ever one work at least on the anvil, sometimes two, often several. In bad or in good health, in France or out of France, you never see him voluntarily lose an instant.

Voluntarily, not; but those who lose most time are not always those who confess it; often, moreover, they themselves are unconscious of it. We will not therefore ask, though others have done it, whether Voltaire was always sincere in what he said about his labours, and the toil and time they cost him; we will admit that he was a great and indefatigable worker. But take the following—a calculation which we hardly could avoid making.

First of all, from these sixty or seventy volumes, we must deduct the correspondence. It sparkles with wit; it is superior to many of Voltaire's works; but, after all, it is not a work, and its author never viewed it in that light. Here, then, is a fourth part deducted, and even more.\*

\* Eighteen volumes out of sixty-four in Benouard's edition (1819).

One volume generally comprises the life of the author ; one or two more the general index of contents ; others, like those comprising the commentaries on Corneille, are only in part composed by Voltaire.

Assuming this, if we consider :—

That several of his historical writings have evidently been composed without previous research and without care ;

That others, more carefully composed, are still far from indicating lengthened and profound research ;

That the romances, the tales, the pamphlets, filling many volumes, flowed almost spontaneously from his inexhaustible vein of thought ;

That his lighter poetry, his greatest triumph, cost him hardly more pains than his prose ;

That several of his tragedies were composed with a prodigious rapidity, from which we may be allowed to infer that he was never much at a loss for verse, even when anxious to do his best ;

That these works, in fine, are the produce of more than sixty years.

If we consider, we say, all these things, we are forced to conclude that Voltaire lost a great deal of time.

Let us note it, then, not as a reproach, for it would be a joke to condemn a man for having written only fifty volumes, but as a fact, and that fact has its importance. The more we shall believe that Voltaire honestly imagined that he devoted himself entirely to his work, the better will his error enable us to establish one of the characteristic features of his time, that *superficiality* which appeared in all things, that sincerity with which people believed themselves the devoted servants of reason, whilst in reality they were taking everything very easily, and abandoning themselves to all their own tastes and all their own caprices.

## CHAPTER XX.

I.—The life of Voltaire—Agitations—Illusions—History of his fortune—His bias towards getting rich—His lawsuits—Establishment at the *Délices*—Strategy—Was he wronged in being left in exile?

II.—His alarms with respect to *La Pucelle*—Denials—Subterfuges—Lies.

III.—Farther lies with respect to the *Philosophical Dictionary*—How the *Encyclopédistes* contrived to vent their indignation and secure their revenge—Diderot—D'Alembert—Rousseau—Voltaire—His paroxysms of rage—What he said of satire, and what he did as a satirist—Insults and sarcasms in the most serious of his works.

IV.—A theatre at the *Délices*—With what object—The Genevese allowed themselves to be caught in that snare—Voltaire's delight.

V.—History of his health—In what lay the principle of his complaints—Labour his best remedy—His angry fits when people thought him better—Anecdote—Some specimens of his complaints—The public little alarmed by them—A day at the *Délices*.

THE whole life of Voltaire would sufficiently confirm, were it necessary, the calculation we have made from his writings. But leaving the agitations of the two first thirds of his career, let us take him at the *Délices* and at Ferney, in that haven into which he had come, he said, in search of peace, and where he would fain have persuaded himself that he had found it. "Durst I venture," he writes to Madame du Deffand, "I should believe myself wise, I am so happy." Alas! so little is happiness in man's nature, that when by chance we happen to meet with any one that affects to have attained it, it is almost a proof, on the contrary, that he is far from having done so, and that he needs to practise an illusion upon himself.

This happiness, then, was agitation at a fixed post instead of agitation of a nomadic kind ; it was having the cares of a proprietor added to those of an annuitant, already so oddly mingled with those of a man of letters. "One finds it difficult, even now," said Thomas, some months after his death, "to imagine his ashes are at rest."

The history of his private fortune, is not without interest in the midst of that of his age. We owe our knowledge of it to his secretary, Longchamp.

He had inherited from his father and his brother about two hundred thousand livres, and he possessed, at his death, nearly two hundred thousand livres of income.

An edition of the *Henriade*, issued in London in 1726, had brought him some money, the only pecuniary return of any consequence he ever had from his works.

But, shortly afterwards, we find him address himself to other resources. Interested, in 1744, in the contracts for the army in Italy, his share of profits amounted to six hundred thousand livres and more. Interested again, in 1746, in the trade of Cadiz, he took care not to invest his whole capital in one vessel, but to distribute it over several. One only was captured, and the profits on the rest were enormous. Interested, in fine, in all great home operations, he rapidly attained that splendid independence which had been the object of his efforts, for he was not what could be called a greedy man. He wanted to be rich, but then it was in order that he might be independent of protectors, that he might speak out what he thought, that he might take himself off, when necessary, and possess the means of everywhere procuring those conveniences which gold can command.

Accordingly, until 1754, his whole fortune was in paper securities ; like Bias, he could say that he carried all that he had about with him. His portfolio, we are told, presented a

prodigious chaos, with his two or three millions of livres in minute parcels, contracts, letters of exchange, acknowledgments of debt, bills of all kinds and all forms. But even he liked to wander in this wilderness of papers. He might well bewail a little the embarrassments which he was continually meeting there, contested claims, lawsuits, small losses and great ones; but just as high-mettled horses need something more than ordinary work for the damping of their fire, so Voltaire needed something over and above literature, for the absorption of a part of that ardour which he could not have thrown entirely into it without going too much beyond what governments could tolerate. With the energy which he threw into nothing more than his quarrel with the President de Brosses\* about the cutting down of some trees, he would have overwhelmed a score of enemies with a score of satires.

This, however, was not always the view that he took. "You tell me," he writes one day to D'Argental, "that it is my lawsuits that impoverish my imagination. On the contrary, they throw me into a passion, and that excites me." At this epoch,† it is true, his lawsuits had undergone a change. It was now the feudal proprietor of Ferney battling with the clergy of the neighbourhood.

But previous to these battles, what ardour already dispensed in establishing himself in the country of his choice! Hardly had he come into possession of the *Délices*, of which he was not even proprietor,‡ than see how he turned everything upside down. "I have made myself mason, carpenter, gardener," he writes to his friend Thiriot, § "my whole house is turned topsy-turvy. These *Délices* (Delights) are at present my torment. We, that is, Madame Denis and I, are busy

\* 1759.

† June 1761.

‡ He had bought a life-interest in that residence, not being allowed, as a Roman Catholic, to hold land in the Genevese territory.

§ March 1755.



building lodgings for our friends and for our poultry. We are having carriages and wheel-barrows made ; we are planting orange-trees and onions, tulips and carrots. We are in want of everything ; we have another Carthage to found. My territory is hardly larger than that bounded by the ox-hide given to the fugitive Dido ; but I have no intention of enlarging it as was done with hers. My house is in the Genevese territory, my meadow in that of France. It is true, I have at the other end of the lake a house and grounds altogether in Switzerland.\* . . . I am putting it in order at the same time with my *Délices*." And, in fact, he was turning everything upside down there too.

It was not only two houses, but two, nay three strategical points, which he wanted to secure. A Frenchman in his meadow, for he did not wish to seem exiled from France, he became a Genevese when he entered the house. Threatened at Geneva, where France was powerful, he could gain Lausanne, in the Bernese territory, and pass it off that he was merely making an excursion to his villa of Monrion.

We have already noticed this last feature in his tactics. Instead of seeking, as others did, in persecution or in the appearance of persecution, an enhancement of his renown and a new source of influence, he wished to appear superior even to persecution, and not to seem to suppose that a government could have any wish to attack him. Nobody was at bottom deceived ; his residence between three states was a sufficient indication of his fears. But he continued to vent his indignation, and that in no mild terms, when any one seemed to suppose he could have any.

Was the French Government right or wrong in keeping him in this kind of exile ? "Voltaire had done imprudent things," says Marmontel ; † "but people acted much more im-

\* Monrion, near Lausanne.

† *Mémoires*, Book v.

prudently, when he would fain have returned to his native country, in obliging him to remain in a land of liberty. The reply made by the king, *Let him remain where he is*, was not well enough weighed. His attacks were not such as are stopped at the frontiers. Versailles, where he would have been more reserved than in Switzerland or in Geneva, was the place to which he should have been banished. The priests ought to have consented to open that magnificent prison for him, the same that Cardinal Richelieu had given to the *Haute Noblesse*. In reclaiming his title of gentleman in ordinary to the king's chamber, he would himself have held the end of the chain by which people might have tethered him, had they wished to do so."

This we doubt. Voltaire was not the man to remain long at his tether, and he would ere long have said or written, even at Versailles, things which it would have been found impossible to ignore. But, wise or not, for the future he had done enough to make his recall to the court an act of weakness from which it might be seen that Louis XV. would recoil. It may have been a political blunder, but after all, it was an honourable one. We will not reproach the King of France for not having wished to look pleasantly on the man who was undermining his throne.

Voltaire remained *where he was*. Alas! he was already everywhere.

II.—He was very nearly under the necessity of making that pretended excursion which he had taken care to keep within his power.

For twenty years and more he had been labouring at that wretched poem which his most devoted adepts would retrench, if they could, from the collection of his works. *La Pucelle* was his recreation, his delight. To it he clung as

much and perhaps more than to the *Henriade*; to it he returned unceasingly with a solicitude and a fondness which certainly say little either for himself or for the age in which such a work could be impatiently looked for.

Great, in fact, that impatience was, and his friends communicated to each other with delight the portions of it that he sent them from time to time. But notwithstanding his prohibition, copies were circulated, and the work fell at last, almost complete, into the hands of people who had no interest in concealing it.

Is it true that these persons added verses to it, detestable, according to Voltaire, and having for their sole object to bring down upon him the rigours of the Government? Detestable, in fact, are those which he quotes as not of his writing; but, in any case, they are hardly more so than those that are his, and there are even some letters in which he disavows them with infinitely less indignation than he does in such or such another letter. His enemies have concluded from this that the whole is his; his friends have never denied it very stoutly. Of what consequence, besides, are the details? The very conception of the poem was infamous enough to make right-minded people not think it worth modifying their opinion of it on account of some verses more or less filthy.

But what activity did he not show in preventing, if possible, the storm with which he saw himself threatened! What an amazing variety of tone, according to the various characters of those whose aid he thought he required to invoke! To some he writes what they were to repeat to everybody, and these he teaches how to lie as he lied himself; to others he represents that untoward work as one of the follies of his youth, as the work of a club of young folks, long ago dissolved, and in which he may perhaps have had a share. Humility and indignation alike served his purpose. A

literary broker having come to him with an offer to purchase, for fifty louis, the manuscript from which the work was to be printed, he ran to Geneva, and, by his cries, succeeded in getting the poor man clapped into prison; he next sent a formal letter of thanks to the magistrates. They had avenged calumniated innocence; they had given a noble example to governments that might wish to oppress him, the apostle of virtue, on account of the infernal inventions of his enemies. "The crowning-point of these infamous manœuvres," he wrote to the *Journal Encyclopédique*, "is the publication of a poem intituled, *La Pucelle d'Orléans* (The Maid of Orleans). The publisher has the effrontery to attribute this poem to the author of the *Henriade*, of *Zaire*, of *Mérope*, of *Alzire*, of the *Age of Louis XIV.* . . . People dare to attribute to him the dullest, lowest, grossest poem that could issue from the press. The pen refuses to transcribe the tissue of sottish and abominable obscenities of that work of darkness." In fine, on receiving one of Rousseau's works,\* he still finds means, in a letter to the author, to protest against those imputations, which he calls infamous; and that letter, printed at the end of the *Orphelin de la Chine*, succeeded at last in appeasing a government which was too weak to dare to retain its wrath against the man who led everybody as he liked.

III.—Let us now see to what perfection lying had been brought.

In 1764, when the *Philosophical Dictionary* first began to be circulated in Paris, "The moment there is any danger," its author writes to D'Alembert, "I beseech of you to let me know, in order that I may disavow the work in all the public papers with my ordinary candour and innocence." His friends

\* *Le Discours sur l'Inégalité des Conditions*—(Discourse on the Inequality of Conditions).

were to do the same. "The Frérons and the Pompignans exclaim that it is mine, and consequently respectable people should exclaim that it is not."

Yet nobody doubted or seemed disposed to doubt. Voltaire well knew that his denials and those of his friends would impose on nobody. On receiving a deputation from the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres,—“Well, then,” said the king to the president Hénault, “do you see the tricks your friend is playing?” But it was known that the Government asked nothing better than to accept the disavowals that gave it a pretext for doing nothing.

Voltaire was so well accustomed to cry slander, that we often see him, in his private letters, treat those as slanderers who had attributed to him such or such a pamphlet which he speaks of at that very moment as his. If the case be that of a writing of which he is not the author, he will not say that that writing has some resemblance to his, and that one might honestly suppose it to have come from his pen. You find him seriously indignant and denouncing as infamous monsters, those who had attributed it to him.

What a hubbub, again, throughout the whole circle, when any one had the audacity to reproach him publicly with that which they most gloried in when with each other—their infidelity! “M. Fréron having ventured, in one of the last sheets of his *Literary Year* for 1774, to amuse himself too indecently at the expense of Diderot, and to speak of him even as an apostle of infidelity”—(what does the reader say of this *even*? But let us proceed)—“the *Encyclopédie* party has got several of last year’s numbers seized, and the further publication of the work suspended.”\* In 1760, D’Alembert had nearly obtained the same revenge, always because Fréron had dared to accuse him of infidelity. In 1766, at the time

\* Bachaumont.

of the frightful affair of the Chevalier de la Barre, what fury was there not against whosoever should dare to say that the unhappy youth had been incited to what he did by the writings of the time! See what Rousseau says in the *Letters from the Hill*, in the letter to the archbishop. It is always at the moment when he is boldest in attacking Christianity, that he is most indignant towards those who accuse him of doing so.

But to return to Voltaire and his *monsters*: never did inquisitor thundering against heretics, give himself fuller swing than the philosopher of Ferney against whosoever should dare to lay hands on his ark. Such epithets as *abominable* and *execrable* crowd under his pen as in the papal bulls. It is to the gallows and the galleys that he would have his enemies sent. "The life of a man condemned to the hulks is preferable to that of a libeller," he says; "for the one may have been condemned unjustly, and the other deserves to be so."\* He seems utterly to forget that he himself had written libels, that he was writing them every day. The most satirical of men protested, on all occasions, that he neither could be nor desired to be satirical. "I have prohibited my mind from being satirical," he says.† And elsewhere: "Were I to follow my own taste, I should never speak of satire but to inspire people with a horror for it, and to arm virtue against that dangerous kind of writing. Satire is almost always unjust, and that is its least fault."‡

After these serious phrases, let us follow him into the details of the war. It is more than satirical, it is an incarnation of satire. To confine ourselves to a single trait, read over this incredible letter: "You should have sent me a list of enemies and their absurdities; it will be rather long, but one ought to

\* *Philosophical Dictionary.*

† Preface to *Alzire*.

‡ *Les Beautés de la Poésie et de l'Eloquence*—(The Beauties of Poetry and Eloquence).

labour for his country's good. I would fain have a few facts. I would have even the baptismal names; saints' names have always a fine effect in verse. We have a kind of jester\* here, who would be found very capable of composing a sort of *Secchia rapita*, and painting the enemies of reason in all the excess of their impertinence. It is of importance, further, to know the name of the bookseller who prints the *Journal de Trévoux*, the *Journal Chrétien*, or such other waste paper; and if that bookseller have a wife or a daughter, or a little boy,—for we must have love, and something interesting in a poem. In a word, my jester wants to laugh and make laugh, for people begin to be tired of serious insults. But keep my jester's secret."

People were beginning, he says, to be tired of serious insults; but he himself was never tired of filling the most serious of his works with them. One would hardly have expected to find that a note in the *Age of Louis XIV.* could have comprised the following sentence: "As for the Abbé Sabatier, a native of Castres, who came to Paris to follow the profession of a slanderer for a little money, it is difficult to expect that he will get to paradise. It requires no small effort even to wish that he may get there." Still less was it to be expected that we should find in the *Philosophical Dictionary*, and in the article *Fine Arts*, such lines as these: "Those who handle lead and mercury are subject to dangerous colics; those who employ pens and ink are attacked with a vermin which must be continually shaken off: this vermin is that of some ex-Jesuits who write libels." Is the question started—still in the *Dictionary*—whether it be true that a man's spittle stupifies and kills the serpent: "I would beg the philosophers, therefore, to examine the matter attentively. One might, for example, on seeing Fréron pass on the street,

\* Meaning himself.

spit on his nose. If he die, the fact will be ascertained, notwithstanding all the doubts of the incredulous." Is the idea of Maupertuis to be combated, who in his *Cosmology* has said: "Of what use are the beauty and the nice contrivance of the serpent's construction? These, it may be said, serve ends of which we are ignorant. Let us at least be silent, then; let us not admire an animal which we know only by the mischief it does us." "Be you, too, silent yourself, then," replies Voltaire. "If some are venomous, you have been that yourself. . . . You ask why the serpent hurts. And you, why have you so often hurt people? Why have you been a persecutor? . . . The question has often been put, why there are so many serpents? and so many wicked men worse than serpents?" Here one might suppose we had gone back to the theological amenities of the sixteenth century.

IV.—But we were at the *Délices* with Voltaire, busy establishing himself at that spot. How many traits should we not have to add before completing the picture of his life for that single year!

His house was still in the hands of the masons, when he was fired with the idea of having a theatre there. "I am looking for Lekain one of these days," he wrote to Thiriot, in the same letter in which he speaks of the founding of Carthage. "We shall plant him in a gallery, and have him declaim verses to the children of Calvin."

The Genevese had no playhouse; he proceeded, therefore, to offer them one. He was bent on alluring into it those grave personages who would have none in their own country; and who, perhaps, were in the right, but whose characters, enfeebled by the enervating atmosphere of the age, were not likely to withstand such an invitation. A few days afterwards, in fact, he writes to M. d'Argental that he had drawn



tears, in *Zaire*, "from the whole Council of Geneva." Here, then, their education had begun. He was in an ecstasy. "Never were the Calvinists so much affected," he adds. And when he says that he had brought tears from their eyes, it was not only the author that spoke, but the actor also, for he had played along with Lekain. What he would not do at the age of sixty for great *seigneurs*, he thought it a good joke to do for the initiation of those burghesses. Accordingly, from the very first day, behold them caught. And, after all, how could it have been otherwise? Here, at their very gates, was that M. de Voltaire whom the world had talked of for more than forty years, the author of the *Henriade*, the friend of the King of Prussia, the chief of literature and of philosophy, the man who had great lords, princes, and kings paying court to him; he had become their fellow-citizen, had opened his house to them, and condescended to act plays for them. Can you wonder, after this, that he should have to write:\* "I am corrupting the whole youth of the pedantic city of Geneva. The preachers are furious. I am annihilating them." He came at last to be almost as proud of acting his plays as of composing them, and boasts of it sometimes with a laughable childishness: "To-day we play *Mahomet*. *Nota bene*, that I seize the very soul in the fourth act."† "My niece has a touchingly soft voice, and when we play together, people cannot stand it."‡ He killed himself by these representations. He would often leave his bed to play his part, and return to bed on leaving the stage.

V.—The history of his health, related likewise by himself, would at least be as curious as that of his literary and dramatic fever. A large volume might easily be made of it,

\* To D'Argental, September 1760.

† Letter to Thiriot, October 1760.

‡ Letter to D'Argental, October 1760.

presenting another inimitable model of the art of expressing the same things in hundreds of different ways.

His ailments—for he had very real ones, and we ought not, because he complained too much, to refuse him all pity—his ailments were all connected with this perpetual excitement. Did the originating cause lie in the mind or in the body? Voltaire himself, especially in his cynical old age, loved to speak only of the machine being out of order; and he is certainly one of those who have expended, as was said, most mind in demonstrating that they were only beasts. Let us do him more honour than he did to himself, and admit at least an equality of influence in the two parts of which he was made up. There was evidently an action and a reaction betwixt the fevers of the body and the great fever of the mind.

Of the mind, we say. We purposely avoid saying “of the soul.” The soul’s fever is that of profound inspirations, of meditations that wear out the man, of bitter thoughts that gnaw the heart. That is a fever that may kill you at twenty, or at thirty; the other will accompany you to the age of eighty—nay more, it is a fever that helps you to reach that age.

Voltaire was sensible of this. Amid his eternal complainings, you never find him complain that labour has affected his health. Quite the contrary, he never complains so little as when he is working; one may see that it was his grand specific. But tell him not that he is better; he will be angry at himself for having permitted you to believe it, and angry at you for having believed it. Accordingly, he takes every possible precaution, unless when he forgets himself, to make people think he is dying; we find him even, if need be, and the better to alarm his friends and those about him, passing himself for a wraith. In 1776, on St. Francis’ eve, some ladies in the neighbourhood had come with bunches of flowers

to wish him joy on his name-day. After having kept them waiting a long time, he made his appearance at last, saying, with a sepulchral voice, "I am dead!" The poor ladies were in such a fright, that not one durst open her mouth.

In 1769: "You ask me news of the master of the house," writes one of the visitors at Ferney.\* "I will tell you that I have met with an excellent reception, that he is a charming man at all points, but intractable on that of his health. To tell him he is well makes him furious. He affects to be afflicted with all the plagues of old age; calls himself deaf, blind, and gouty. Now judge of this for yourself. The first day of my arrival, he made the ordinary complaints. I allowed him to go on, and while walking in the garden with him gradually lowered my voice. I was soon relieved as to his hearing. Next, on complimenting him on the beauty of his garden, he began to swear at his gardener, who, he said, was a careless fellow; and, from time to time, he picked up some very small weeds that were hid among his tulips. I concluded that his eyesight was still quite unimpaired; and from the ease with which he stooped and raised himself again, I felt convinced there was no want of suppleness in his movements, or pliancy in his limbs."

In 1753: "I am very ill," he wrote to D'Argens; "deign to remember this. It is my enemies only that say I am well."

In 1754, writing again to D'Argens: "Your letter would make the saddest of the damned die with laughing. I am unhappily of that number. It is now six months since I have ventured out of my warm room (*lit. copper kettle*)."

In 1752, to M. Bagieux: "I brought with me to Berlin a score of teeth; hardly six are now left me. I brought with me two eyes; I have almost lost one."

\* Bachaumont's *Secret Memoirs*.

In 1746, to Maupertuis: "It is true that the king has made me a present of the office of gentleman of the chamber, that he has augmented my pension, that he loads me with his bounties; but I am dying.... Behold me now a member of the Academy. I am to tire the public with a long harangue on Monday next. It will be the song of the dying swan."

In 1748, when it was a question how the shade of Ninus, in *Semiramis*, should be dressed: "In what concerns the shade," he writes, "I ought to be believed, for I have the honour to be a little of one myself, and now more than ever."

In 1736, in his first letter to Frederick, he makes it a settled point that he must be considered a confirmed invalid and a dying man. "In whatever corner of the world I close my life..." he says.

In 1733, he has broken through his agony, he writes to the Abbé de Sade, to assure him that he will be attached to him "during all the time of his short and worthless life" (*sa courte et chienne de vie*).

In 1724, in the preface to his *Mariamne*, we find him already "overwhelmed with continual ailments." The good public would surely have a tender regard for the efforts made by a dying man to please it.

But one would have said that the good public was already aware that it was yet to have fifty years of those efforts. Neither at this nor at any future period, do we see any one appear seriously pained at Voltaire's sufferings, or seriously alarmed about his preservation. It is, nevertheless, incontestable that his life was many times in danger; but how could people be expected to believe a man expiring when he had so often told them that he was in his last agony, and above all when he told them this so pleasantly? \* Then he himself had very little respect for his old age; he liked to

\* *Memoirs*, Book viii.

laugh and to make others laugh at all the infirmities it brought along with it. His famous letter to the Duke de Richelieu is well known, with its grotesque details about his personal appearance. Still he did not always confine himself to mere grotesque, and letters occur after reading which one is not so much tempted to laugh as to grieve at such a lamentable forgetfulness of all that white hairs impose on those who carry them.

In fine, even had his dying agonies been believed at a distance, it would have been difficult to remain in error when present with him. "Nothing could be more original," says Marmontel, "than the welcome he gave us.\* He was in bed. He stretched out his arms to us; he wept with joy when embracing us; he embraced in like manner the son of his old friend, M. Gaulard. 'You find me in a dying state,' he said. 'Are you come to recall me to life or to receive my last sighs?' My comrade was frightened at this opening scene; but I, who had heard Voltaire say a hundred times that he was dying, made a sign to Gaulard that there was no cause for alarm." And, in fact, behold the dying man gets out of bed, spends the whole day with them, gives their ears no rest with his babbling about Paris, about the Encyclopædists, about Pompignan, who had dared to attack them in the discourse delivered at his reception—Pompignan his *bête noire* for the time; for his physician had ordered him, he said, by way of exercise, "to abuse Pompignan for an hour or two every morning!" He dined with them, he supped with them. He regaled them with the songs of M. de l'Ecluse, his host, formerly actor at the *Opera-Comique*, and then dentist to the King of Poland; and when they thought he must be quite exhausted, and sighing for his bed, behold,

\* In 1760.

he sets himself to recite two new parts of his beloved *Pucelle*, and cannot think of allowing them to retire !

Such was the whirl amid which he continued, as he said, to believe himself happy in his retreat, because wise, and wise because happy. Sometimes, notwithstanding, he would smile at himself, and at his pretensions to happiness as well as his pretensions to wisdom. "I never had an idea of happiness," he exclaimed,\* "until I lived at home in my retreat. But such a retreat ! I have sometimes fifty people at table."

\* To the Abbé d'Olivet, March 1755

## CHAPTER XXI.

- I.—Voltaire at Ferney—Was he fond of rural occupations?—He had no taste for the charms of nature—Few had any at that epoch—Diderot—Louis Racine—Buffon—What he loved in nature, and what he sought for in it.
- II.—Nature in the seventeenth century—Fénelon—La Fontaine—Boileau and his melons—Racine and his olive trees—The *beauties* of Languedoc—Arnauld and his apricot trees—How it was that, at that time, people could dispense with the love of nature.
- III.—Voltaire inspired at last—*My lake is the premier lake*—People laugh and he laughs—The *Seasons*—Voltaire's admiration—His indignation at those who did not join in it.
- IV.—Nature everywhere subjugated to art—Gardens—Châteaux—Gothic art—Art and nature in the Middle Ages—Germany and its golden souls—In the eighteenth century, a relish for nature was wanting both in the believing and the unbelieving.
- V.—How Gothic art was despised—Notre-Dame and the Hôtel-de-Ville in Paris—Love for Gothic art has returned with love for nature.

It was much worse when he had purchased Ferney, and when to his literary labours, to his theatrical fatigues, to those of a princely hospitality, he pretended to add the labours of agriculture.

Had he really any taste for this new career? It is not easy to say. At times you will find him express himself on this subject in terms apparently truthful and from the heart; at other times he seems not so much to feel this novel kind of felicity, as to make an effort to seem satisfied. But of this there is no doubt, that he was more than ordinarily fond of talking about his lands, his crops, his cattle, and that in reply to the most flattering compliments paid to his glory, he would take delight in saying, like Diocletian, that the whole was not worth the vegetables in his garden.

It is further certain, that he did not love nature, at least in the sense now attached to that passion. It was not until he got to the borders of the lake of Geneva, in 1755, that nature began to be something in his regard. Until then, he had never seen it; not a single gleam of it had ever been allowed to fall either on his verses or on his prose. A journey to him was a broad highway and a certain number of inns. In Germany, he had never contrived to get beyond complaining of the severity of the climate, and the absence of comfort in the house accommodation. To England he had gone in search of men and books. These he found, but never dreamt of looking for anything else. We do not perceive, at least, that the rich poetical character of British scenery had fixed itself at all in his memory, or that it had left any impression on his heart. The *Henriade* had been elaborated in England, and afterwards as well as before, one might have said that there was not so much, in that poem, as "grass for the horses."

One sense was wanting in him, in some sort, and not only in him, but in all the authors of that epoch—for we proceed immediately to inquire if Rousseau was any exception, and whether the love of nature were not rather, in him, the hatred of what was not nature. Among the least deaf to the majestic voice of the universe, was Diderot; he complained with much simplicity that he was never quite an atheist, except in town. Like Voltaire, Montesquieu had hardly seen, when in England, more than London; like Voltaire, Rousseau the poet might have described, in fine verses, the rising or the setting of the sun, but even that coldly, and at most as a lyrical amplification. Louis Racine had sought, but more as a reasoner than as a poet, proofs of the existence of God; the encyclopædical school, who cared little about seeing them there, took no pains to devote itself to speculations of that



kind. Pastorals had been written ; but that species of composition, always more or less false, had never been so false as in this century. Buffon, even Buffon, with all his eloquence, has no sense of nature and no love for it, or if he loved it, it was as one loves what he makes use of, as one becomes attached to that which he appropriates for his own ends. Buffon excelled in looking for himself in his grand pictures of the universe. Admire them you must ; but ask yourself then whom you have been admiring there, God or the author, and see whether it be not the author, and the author alone. How well did he select, in that immense field, whatever best suited his grandiose style ! How did he despise whatever refused to lend itself to its pomp of language ! See, in his *Discourse on the nature of Animals*, how he sneers at the historians of insects ! He must have nothing less than the horse, the lion, the tiger, the humming-bird, at least, for he could amuse himself in wrestling with the lustre of its plumage and the sprightliness of its attitudes ; but as for the cockchafer and the ant, away with them ! “ Which,” says he, “ will have the greater idea of the Supreme Being, he who beholds Him creating the universe, ordaining existences, founding nature on invariable laws, or he who seeks Him and wishes to find Him occupied with the concerns of a commonwealth of flies ? ” Which of the two, *Monsieur le Comte* ? Let us see. Try to make for us one of those flies whose commonwealth you would withdraw from the eye of God. Make only, O maker of fine sentences, a worm, a polypus, a mushroom ! And if, as is likely, you succeed no better than in making a horse or a sun, confess then that, for the Father of existences, there is nothing small, nothing great. La Fontaine was more philosophical than you, when he described Jupiter’s ape as sent to divide a blade of grass among some ants.

II.—Let us acknowledge, however, that this lack of true taste for nature, did not date from the invasion of infidel doctrines.

The seventeenth century had, on this point, been little superior to the eighteenth. Nature had remained beyond the sphere of the inspirations of its philosophers, its orators, its poets. Fénelon, who has painted nature much, drew inspiration admirably from its ancient painters, but was little inspired by itself; and La Fontaine is the only author who, at that epoch, was truly an exception. He was fond of bold reveries; he went to the woods sometimes, it is true, like Boileau, in search of words, of rhymes, but sometimes, also, in quest of those ravishing inspirations such as Virgil found there, whence there afterwards flowed, without effort, those Virgilian lines that are to be met with in his fables. Boileau has, no doubt, composed some likewise, but they are translated. Nature for him was comprised in his garden at Auteuil, with its well-raked alleys, its melons waiting for Master Anthony's watering-pan, its flowers "which ask themselves if it be a holiday in the village," a great poetical audacity of which the author was at once quite proud and yet a little fearful. Racine, infinitely more a poet, drew no more than Boileau from this source. Shall it be said that there was no call for his doing so? He who knows nature and who loves nature, cannot be but always drawing from nature. Racine knew it not; he once made an approach to it in a strophe of *Athalie*—no very near approach, for the idea is hackneyed.\* We have letters written in his youth, where he gives a friend an account of a journey, and he too, we find, saw nothing but roads and inns. What he was most struck with in the south of France, was the horrible bitterness of the olives, seeing that

\* "He gives the flowers their lovely forms,  
Creates—mature—the fruits."...

he had taken it into his head to gather one and to plant an ignorant tooth in it. It is thus that Voltaire, in his impressions of the countries beyond the Rhine, always spoke of the strong beer which was put before him on all the roads, and which his Parisian stomach had a horror for. Racine, in those same letters, is frequently led to say a word about the countries he is traversing, but that word is always what we should rather expect from a mercantile traveller. Even before the affair of the olives, he shuddered at the sight of the olive trees, for the only thing they suggested to his imagination and to his heart, was, that he would have to eat dishes dressed in oil. In fine, we find him write: "I cannot omit telling you something about the beauties of this province." But these *beauties* of Languedoc were the beautiful women whom he had seen, or thought he had seen, at Uzès. Follow him, after he had become a graver man, under the trees of Port-Royal. There he went in search of faith, as Voltaire went to London in search of infidelity; but as for nature, you find he has made no progress in thinking of it. A silly person of the last century, taking his *Thébaïde*\* to be a poem on the country bearing that name, famous of old for its hermits, said that that book had, no doubt, been suggested to him by the solitary woods of Port-Royal. Without falling into such stupid blunders, people have generally been much mistaken, we conceive, as to the place that nature occupied in the meditations of Racine's pious friends. We, in this respect the children of Chateaubriand, have fashioned them a little after our own image, and we are too oblivious of the apricot trees of the great Arnauld. This ought not to be any reason for our esteeming him less; but, in fine, an apricot tree is not an oak, an espalier and a white wall are not the blue expanse of heaven.

\* *La Thébaïde*, or, *Les Frères Ennemis*. 1664.

But how happens it that this coldness and this insensibility to the charms of nature, shock us far less in the men of the seventeenth century than in those of that which followed?

It is because they were rich enough without it. It might, no doubt, have enhanced their fecundity, and enriched their palette with some livelier colours; but for all that, we do not find in them either want of colour, or insufficiency, or emptiness. Who is there that would think of remarking, unless led to it, as we are at this moment, by cold historical researches, that this source was almost closed to Racine and to Bossuet? God was there, and where God is, there is everything. But where God is no longer present, then there is a sense of emptiness. It is with minds as with bodies, when the principle of life is attacked, such or such a local infirmity, which was hardly noticed when the general health was good, becomes of itself a disease.

III.—One day, in fine, under a happier inspiration, Voltaire wrote those well-known lines in which the grand ideas of nature and of liberty mingle in such masculine harmony. In his eyes, the austerity of the north and the blandness of the south had met on the borders of *his* lake. He was quite astonished, some beautiful morning or some majestic sunset, to feel his heart swell a little, and—who knows?—his eye a little moist. He put down on paper this beginning of tears; those few verses, in which there is something of Virgil and something of Ossian, and in which, perhaps, there is more sensibility than in any he ever wrote.

“How, on this spot, doth all delight the sense  
Astonish’d at the scene’s magnificence!  
See that calm ocean’s waves translucent kiss  
The flow’ry margin of those fields of bliss. .

Lo, what a scene of snow, and glory too,  
Those mountain solitudes present to view.

"Then let the Roman tyrant's flatterer  
 In numbers soothing to his patron's ear,  
 Let Maro, in harmonious Georgic strains,  
 No longer vaunt his lovely native plains,  
 And lakes with shores magnificently grand,  
 Dug out by nature in Italian land.  
 Mine is the premier lake. Upon its sides  
 Th' eternal goddess of mankind resides.  
 Soul of great projects, aim of great desires,  
 Here freedom dwells. . . .

Thy throne, O Freedom ! is establish'd here. . . .  
 When Friendship calls thee to her calm retreat,  
 Grace with thy presence her soft grassy seat;  
 Like thee, she courts abhors, and shuns, like thee,  
 The world's cabals and its frivolity.  
 Twofold the charm that these twin powers endears;  
 While the one elevates, the other cheers;  
 May both my life inspire, solace, and guide !  
 Both at my death triumphantly preside !"

Thus, then, did Voltaire one day sing—for this word to *sing*, so ridiculously out of place in many cases, was not so in this. Well, then, it was with an immense peal of laughter that Paris was to receive these fine verses. It was only, in the view of the knowing, a kind of palinode—a piece to be added to the monkish sermons which the author had occasionally imposed on himself when he wanted to play the good apostle among simpletons. "The epistle of M. de Voltaire," wrote Grimm,\* "has as yet found no partisan to defend it against the general censure of the public of Paris. It is impossible, in fact, to dissemble that it is too bad to deserve the support of any one. It is one of those misshapen and helpless brats which its father, were he a Spartan, would have condemned to death from its very birth."

Accordingly, he thought no more about it. Who knows, besides, but that he did not wait for the laughter of Paris in order to make a jest of his own enthusiasm, and very soon shook the dust from his knees after bending them for a mo-

\* July 1755.

ment before the marvellous works of God? For the future, therefore, he keeps to simply saying that he had a magnificent view from his windows, and takes good care that no reflection from the summits of Mont Blanc shall ever be allowed to fall upon his verses.

Since nature had been laughed at when viewed for once in her true majesty, she could not fail to be thought most beautiful in the *Seasons* of the atheist Saint-Lambert, so much commended, besides, by Voltaire himself, who was nettled at the surprise people felt at his eulogiums. "I know," he writes in 1769,\* "that there are souls equally base and jealous, who could reproach me for giving M. Saint-Lambert eulogies for eulogies, and carrying on a traffic with him in personal vanity. I declare to them, that I should not admire him the less had he never praised me. . . . I look upon his work as an honourable reparation made by the present age to the past, for the vogue which has been for some time given to so many barbarous writings." The *Seasons* are not, in fact, a barbarous writing; they are only insipid, cold, and affected. But few were sensible of this—still more, few dared to say as much; and, indeed, it was not unattended with danger. For having laughed a little at the praises of Voltaire, Clement had been thrown into Fort-l'Evêque. Could the same thing have been refused to M. le Marquis de Saint-Lambert?

IV.—But it was not only in poetry that nature was compulsorily invested with the forms of a narrow and dry art. Everywhere, and as far as man could reach, it was forced into subjection to an analogous yoke. With their alleys always straight, their geometrical thickets, their trees mercilessly cut into pyramids or spheres,† the gardens and the parks of that

\* Letter to Dupont de Nemours.

† The first *English* garden in France had been that established by Montesquieu. If

epoch harmonized with the inspirations of the poets, as well as with the invariably square châteaux that were built on the despised ruins of the old ancestral donjon towers.

We may remark, on this last point, that contempt or love for Gothic art have generally accompanied coldness or enthusiasm for the beauties of nature. Might not this be thought one, among many other indications, that Greek art was further from nature than is commonly believed? We have seen, in reviewing the drama, that its admirers have often called that natural which was conventional, and have often blamed as a departure from nature that which was in reality an approach to it.

Now, never have art and nature been more strictly united than during the long period of the Middle Ages. We shall not inquire whether the clustered and branching pillars of our cathedrals were meant to simulate the interior of a forest; we speak only of that intimate, profound, unalterable alliance, that had been formed in men's souls between the love of art and the love of nature. On this subject there is a fine passage in Michelet\*—a little mystical, perhaps, but which, if better reasoned, would be less true. "Our Norman cathedrals," says he, "are singularly numerous, beautiful, and varied; their daughters in England are prodigiously rich, delicate, and subtly elaborated. But mystical genius is more strongly marked, it seems, in the churches of Germany. There was in that country a land well prepared, a soil expressly fitted for producing the flowers of Christ. Nowhere have man and nature, brother and sister, exhibited beneath the Father's eye a purer or more infantine love. The German soul takes kindly to flowers, to trees, to beautiful hills consecrated to

he had not learned in England to receive inspiration from nature, he had learned there at least not to mutilate her. But the fashion was not quickly followed. The second garden of the kind was that of the famous advocate Gerbier, on his estate of Aulnoy, towards 1770.

\* *History of France.*

God ; and with these it has built miracles of art, as, at the birth-time of the child Jesus, they dress out the Christmas tree covered over with garlands, ribbons, and girandoles, for the delight of children. It was there that the Middle Ages produced golden souls, who have passed away without being known to fame—ingenuous souls, at once puerile and profound, who had hardly any consciousness of time, who never left the bosom of eternity, letting the world roll past them, without distinguishing in its stormy waves anything but the blue of heaven.”

These ingenuous and profound souls—who saw art in nature, nature in art, and God the supreme artist everywhere—were never more rare than in the eighteenth century. Of that mysterious union, of this great fact, which they had read on the front of the stars, and which they wrote on the front of their temples, who was there that then was capable of conceiving the very statement? Could the believers of that time have understood it any better than the unbelievers? There was wanting in all, what constitutes the true sentiment of art—that of nature. “If nature has not been felt, the arts, which merely transform nature, and bring together her scattered rays in order to produce a unique and profound emotion, will become powerless.”\*

V.—Thus, all that bore the seal of mediæval art was greatly contemned. All of it that could be destroyed, was destroyed, and with hearty good-will ; what braved the hammer was left to suffer from time and the seasons. No regret was felt for those cathedrals which crumbled away stone after stone, elevating, by the accumulation of their broken sculptures, the level of the surrounding streets and closes. In 1745, in a kind of address to the Edileship of Paris, Voltaire speaks of

\* Madame Necker de Saussure.



nothing less than pulling down Notre-Dame, and substituting a temple more worthy, he says, of the capital. "Is it not of a barbarous architecture?" "In vain," he adds, "in vain would your indolence answer that it would cost too much money." He regrets, with much reason, that some of the millions swallowed up at Versailles, had not been laid out in the cleansing and beautifying of Paris; but the first of embellishments, according to him, would be the demolition of the relics of ancient art. "London," he elsewhere says,\* "was not so rich as Paris when its aldermen erected St. Paul's, which is the second church in Europe, and seems to reproach us with our Gothic cathedral." Elsewhere, again,† he would fain that, instead of celebrating so many festivals in the Hôtel-de-Ville in Paris, "which is of the worst taste in the world," they would pull it down at once, like Notre-Dame, to be rebuilt with the money unceasingly expended there. A long while afterwards, in another letter to the King of Prussia, after having said of Corneille all the ill he could force himself to think of him, he added as his last and final criticism: "His pieces seem to me to resemble fine Gothic churches."

This at the present day would be a high encomium, for the fact which we signalized has reappeared: on returning to the worship of nature, people have come back to the appreciation and the love of mediæval art. That in this return all has been wise and good we are far from affirming, any more than we admire without reserve all that has been done in poetry since the classic has yielded precedence to the new art. But not the less is it the only course in which, henceforward, true beauties are to be found, and true emotions to be felt.

\* *Des Embellissements de Paris*—(Embellishments of Paris). 1749.

† Letter to Frederick, August 1739.

## CHAPTER XXII.

- I.—Effects of the divorce between nature and art—Rousseau—Apparent incoherence and real coherency—Importance of a first step in an ardent and versatile man—Rousseau's, what it was—A small matter would have impelled him in an opposite direction.
- II.—Elements of his conviction and of his eloquence—*Credo quod absurdum*—Always voluntarily with his back to the wall—A phrase in his first discourse—Philosophical infallibility—Ever sentiment in the place of reason.
- III.—Paradoxical thesis; false method—*From dispute to dispute*—Criticisms only made his convictions all the stronger—Public fright—Voltaire's embarrassment—*Timon*.—V.—Rousseau's reputation the work of the Encyclopædists—In what sense his ideas were accepted—Real success; factitious success—How Montaigne, whom he quotes, was wiser than he—A pleading against civilization says too much or nothing at all.
- VI.—Is it true that nature would have us ignorant and stationary?—Our faculties—Advances which we should find it impossible not to make—What was implied in Rousseau's *savage state*—What one must admit in professing to be his disciple—Montesquieu had already almost broached the same idea.

THERE was a divorce, accordingly, between art and nature.

Let us see now what influence this divorce was to exercise on the opinions and success of a man who thought he saw in it a necessary, a fatal fact, and who set himself all at once to carry it out to its remotest consequences.

It is not uninteresting, in fact, that this was Rousseau's starting-point. Give a somewhat wider meaning to the words *Art* and *Nature*—call *art* the collective advances of mankind, *nature* the collective circumstances in which man has been placed on this earth—and the principles which we have laid down will assist you in forming a just idea of Rousseau, his

life as well as his books, his good pages as well as his bad ones, his paradoxes, and the reception they met with.

Few men have been so incoherent, apparently, in their philosophy and their conduct; yet there never was one, perhaps, whose successive opinions form a chain more compact, more solid, more entirely of a piece. All that he proceeded to say in whole volumes, you had found already in the few pages of his first composition—his discourse on the arts and the sciences.

Shall we admit, therefore, that kind of historical fatalism, which will have it that every person of eminence is developed according to certain positive and necessary laws? Shall we say that Rousseau, coming into the world with his peculiar mental qualities, could not have failed to be just what he was, or to say just what he said?

These assertions, which we cannot call false, because it is impossible to demonstrate their falsity, are always at least rash, and it were better to abstain from making them. In like manner as two lines may come to be separated by a prodigious distance from each other, because you have made them at their departure form an angle of the thickness of a hair, so may some minute, imperceptible circumstance, lead a man to profess opinions which would never otherwise have been his, and to live and die for a cause which he might otherwise have combated with equal ardour. If born a Protestant, what would Bossuet have been? We esteem him enough to believe, that he would have mounted without quailing one of those scaffolds which his eloquent intolerance had led Louis XIV. to erect.

Suppositions of this kind, which assuredly cannot be given as anything but suppositions, acquire, notwithstanding, all the more probability the greater the mobility of the man's character with whom we have to do. Helvetius made the remark; and

what did he adduce as confirming it? \* Why, just the history of Rousseau, with whom no one was better acquainted. It was, no doubt, in order that he might draw the conclusion that all things in this world are absolutely subject to chance; but though it be an atheist's conclusion, the details by which he reached it are not, in so far as Rousseau is concerned, the less exact or the less curious.

Is it true, then, that Rousseau, in resolving to treat the question that had been proposed by the Academy of Dijon, thought at first of taking the side of the sciences and the arts? Could this be proved—and we are much inclined to think that it has been proved—we should have to obliterate many pages, and very fine ones too, that have been written in our days on the secret development of his genius, on the meditations to which he had devoted himself before writing, on the bitter enmities he had been amassing against society in an unsettled youth and a maturity without any fixed position; we should further have to conclude that the *Confessions* are far from tracing to us the true affiliation of his ideas. This, it is true, does not precisely involve a charge of bad faith. Rousseau might have been sincere in reconstructing the past on the model of his posterior impressions, just as the painter, after having modified his second plan, is led on to modify his first. The only point on which we should have to bring a decided charge of falsehood, is that of the fact itself of the alleged sudden change of purpose. Rousseau denied it, but not until many years after. Marmontel and Morellet, on the other hand, affirm in their *Memoirs*, that it was a thing known, admitted, incontestable among Rousseau's own friends.

For ourselves, we make it no point to establish that he changed his opinions in the hope of thereby making more noise, but no more would we have people say that he must

\* *De l'Homme et de son Education*—(Of Man and his Education)—Chap. viii.

necessarily have adopted the side which he undertook to defend. Down to the moment that his heated imagination had taken possession definitively of the subject thus conceived, it is probable, nay, it is evident, looking to what he himself gives us to know of the unsettledness of his previous convictions, that a very small matter might have led to his resolving to maintain another opinion.

II.—But in whatever way he may have been led to adopt such a thesis, it may still be asked how it came to be his conviction, his creed; for one never can admit that so much eloquence could have issued from a lie of which he had preserved the consciousness, and which remained in his mind in the state of a lie.

Here, first, let us note a phenomenon, half intellectual, half moral, of which he has not been a solitary example, but which has never appeared, and perhaps never will again appear, in equal vigour.

It was—should we call it faculty or mania?—it was the habit, in fine, of putting his soul entirely at the service of each idea, of being incapable of stating any one idea without its instantly assuming, in his eyes, the importance, and, in some sort, the sacredness of a dogma. The more paradoxical it was, the more eagerly did he embrace it with that sort of faith which alone, he well knew, could render him insensible to the objections by which it would be assailed. It was St. Augustine's *Credo quod absurdum*; which did not mean, it is true, "I believe that *because* it is absurd," but—"Finding that I cannot demonstrate it by reasoning, I embrace it by faith."

Such, then, is the rampart which Rousseau ever sets himself to raise, in his own mind, between his opinions and the attacks he is expecting. Whatever the force of your objections, say

not you are about to compel him to go to the wall, for he has gone there already. It is he himself that has voluntarily taken up a position from which it is impossible to retreat. With the tone he assumes and the authority he gives himself, he can no longer, whatever you may say to him, acknowledge that he has been mistaken, for a confession of the smallest error would be a confession of his general fallibility, and his language has been that of infallibility. What the Duchess de la Ferté said in her simplicity to Madame de Staal : "I find nobody but myself always in the right," Rousseau repeats indirectly at every page, in every sentence ; and nothing but his eloquence prevents him from being constantly sensible how ridiculous it is. When people laughed at the Abbé de Saint-Pierre writing that painting, sculpture, music, poetry, the drama, architecture, prove the number of idlers in the world, and the taste they have for idleness, which taste suffices for the nurture and support of other kinds of idlers\*—when people laughed, we say, at such childish extravagance, he merely said in plain terms what Rousseau was afterwards to say eloquently.

In the very first page of his first discourse : "After having supported the side of truth," says he, "whatever be my success, there is a prize which cannot fail me ; I shall find it in my own breast."

Here we find him portrayed in three lines better than one could portray him in a volume ; and that volume, besides, would only be a development of these three lines.

Mark his words. He has supported "the side of truth." Far from him that hackneyed modesty of an author who should be content to say : "I have spoken according to my conscience ; I have given an exposition of what has to me appeared to be truth." No. At the first step he affirms ;

\* *Annales Politiques*—(Political Annals).

he, a philosopher, succeeds at the very first in what philosophers have always most reproached divines with doing, that is to say, in believing himself necessarily in the right, and repelling beforehand the objections of all gainsayers as irrelevant. But the divine has this excuse at least, that it is not of himself that he speaks, that he only states what he has seen or imagines he has seen in the teachings of God, and there can be no error in them. But whence has Rousseau taken what he proceeds to teach in that discourse, what he declares to be *the truth*? From historical facts, which he well knows to be susceptible of more than one interpretation; from his own reason, which yesterday, perhaps, was in favour of the contrary opinion, and which, at all events, waited for an academical competition before pronouncing on this subject. He will tell us, indeed, that it is not his reason that is about to speak and that he has only lent his voice to nature; but this, after all, is but a round-about way of contriving to give himself authority and audacity; for it is clear that *nature* in the mouth of a man, is always nature interpreted by that man's reason. There is not a whit less pride, therefore, in dogmatizing in the name of nature than there is in dogmatizing in the name of God, or, to speak more candidly, in calling one's-self infallible of his own proper self.\*

See, further, to what a lofty moral elevation he hastens, from the very first, to raise this question, which he very well knows he will be accused of having made an occasion for a mere display of wit. It had its place evidently in the domain of history and of reason; but he made it an affair of the

\* When Montesquieu said, in the preface to the *Spirit of Laws*, "I have not drawn my principles from my prejudices, but from the nature of things," he practised the same deception on himself as Rousseau did. An absolute thinker is necessarily led to desire being apparently only the organ of a superior authority. Though it may not arise from any calculated purpose to impose on others, still there is an involuntary calculation for the sake of acquiring confidence in one's-self.

heart; and as if he durst not say openly that—even though standing alone against all—he would persist in believing himself alone reasonable, it is in his heart that he places his reward. There, he says, it cannot fail him.

III.—There are, then, in that first discourse, two things to be considered: the thesis, which is merely paradoxical; the method, which is false. With the same thesis, defended in another way and left in the domain of common sense, that opening might have come to have had no lengthy consequences; with such a method, the soul and life of the author continued to be enslaved to his thesis; he had but one alternative, either to disavow in plain terms what he had eloquently supported, or to pursue his course regardless of the ruins with which he would be obliged to strew it.

Have we not here what he himself confessed some years afterwards, in his famous letter to the Archbishop of Paris? “A miserable academical question, agitating my mind in spite of myself, threw me into an occupation for which I was never made. An unlooked-for success showed me attractions that seduced me. Hosts of adversaries attacked me without understanding me . . . I defended myself, and from dispute to dispute, felt myself engaged in the career almost without having thought of it.”

There are in these lines more revelations of the inner man than he thought or desired to make. It was from dispute to dispute, he says, that he engaged in the course he had pursued. But what he says of the manner in which he became an author, does he not say, in like manner, of the successive development of his ideas? Every step he took was marked by a new paradox, each, however, being but another and an enlarged form of his first paradox. After the discourse on the arts and the sciences, the discourse on inequality; after



the discourse on inequality, the *Contrat Social*, in which he arrives at last consequences, and in which society is condemned, not only in its abuses, but in its foundations, its very existence. Such was the point to which he was led, not by calm meditation, for that would have led him infallibly to correct, on the contrary, his first assertions, but, he himself confesses, from dispute to dispute, from anger to anger. Even had he not confessed it, we should still be sufficiently sensible of it. See how he attaches himself, in his second production, precisely to the development of what was most shocking in his first. See him, in his intermediate smaller works,\* reply at once to objections by merely repeating more forcibly than ever the very things that had especially provoked them. This course he follows to the last. Enough that such or such an idea, which he may have only cursorily emitted, and which he might abandon without any one dreaming of charging him with having retracted his opinions, has been made the object of an attack, in order to its becoming, in his eyes, important, fundamental, and to his thinking himself obliged to deduce from it all the consequences of which it can be the source. He behaves, pen in hand, as people too often do in disputes of the tongue, when a man thinks himself obliged to maintain all that he has advanced, even at haphazard, and is at last confounded, and sometimes feels much abashed, at the progress he has made. But as for Rousseau, he cannot exhibit either surprise or shame, for he should thus disown himself; he might do what he would not wish to do, for he glories in speaking with all the more assurance the more the idea is venturesome, and even the more contrary it is to what he himself has said elsewhere. Emphatically a contradictor, he is never more eloquent than when sensible that he is contradicting himself. Such is the spirit, such the way in which

\* Letter to Raynal, Letter to Grimm, Reply to the King of Poland, to M. Bordes, &c.

were thrown upon paper, many of those doctrines to which people have attached so much importance, although Rousseau himself began by attaching to them none whatever.

IV.—But that which gave them so much success, was mainly the absence of any serious counterpoise. Rousseau was attacked feebly and foolishly. We cannot wonder; a solid footing was wanting in the resistance opposed to him.

What one must understand by this we have already said, in pointing to the profound separation existing betwixt nature and art, betwixt the man of nature and the man of civilization. That separation Rousseau had formally declared. From the fact of its actual existence, he had concluded that it necessarily existed; he had placed man in the alternative of choosing between corruption as synonymous with civilization, and virtue as synonymous with nature. The question was not properly stated; but in order to this error being corrected with a firm hand, there were required other men, other circumstances, and another age. People were ill situate, amid that chaos, for distinguishing between civilization and corruption; they refused, very reasonably, to see the reign of virtue in the gross golden age of savages; but they were much at a loss when they tried to point to it elsewhere. Social ties were too generally relaxed to allow even those who believed in them, to feel themselves strong in opposing the man who taught people not to believe in them. Accordingly: "It is not the scandal which was general," says a cotemporary; \* "*there was a sort of terror.*" Not a very serious terror, it is true; the terror of a people who laugh while waiting for a battle or the plague; terror nevertheless, and that lasted for some days. Society found itself in the condition of an invalid to whom his physician has announced the prospect of

\* Garat. *Mémoires sur la Vie de Suard.*

his yet living, and even living long, but that his disease is incurable. It was clearly seen that it would never return to that state of nature to which Rousseau would have sent it back as the sole means of recovering its health and vigour; and besides, nobody desired to return to it. Other remedies no one knew. Those who still thought that there was one in religion, either durst not venture to say so, or got themselves laughed at, all the more as religion was then very ill represented, and seemed hardly adequate to such a task. So there was nothing for it but to submit to Rousseau's verdict. He was strong, not because he was in the right, but because the age in which he appeared had nothing to say in reply.

Voltaire, who had an answer to give to everybody, was not the last to feel this universal embarrassment. He tried to be witty; all he had to do, he thought, was to imitate the man who, in reply to a philosopher who denied that there was such a thing as motion, got up and walked. Hence, one of those amusing little stories which he composed so cleverly, and which, though excellent for attack, are powerless for defence. "‘I have burnt all my books,’ said Timon to me yesterday. ‘All?’ ‘All.’” And Timon then explains how books, literature in general, the sciences, the arts, and everything connected with them, are good for nothing but making men scoundrels. "At the corner of a wood we were met by some robbers and mercilessly plundered. I asked those gentlemen in what university they had studied, on which they confessed that none of them had learnt to read." They got to a country-house belonging to a highly cultivated man, and one devoted to the arts and literature. If Timon be in the right, he must now expect at least to have his throat cut. But no. They meet with an excellent reception, splendid fare, &c. And so Timon was refuted.

One may laugh at this story as people laughed at all Vol-

taire's stories ; but it was the foundation that was affected, and this dealt only with the surface.

V.—It is true that Rousseau, at this period, was a friend and a brother, whom the sect of the Encyclopædists found it much their interest to spare. One must not imagine because he appears ere long as the enemy of Voltaire and the Encyclopædists, that he was under no obligations to them. Their anticipated praises had paved the way for his success. They could no longer, when the time came, oppose it ; and, moreover, but for the ties he had formed with them, and that commencement of renown which he owed to them, his discourse might have passed off unnoticed. There was a revolution in those pages of his ; but in order to this they behoved to start from the side from which revolutions were looked for. Without that mark, they remained a mere academical discourse.

This is no quibble on the origin of his glory, but an observation on an error into which people have often fallen, with respect to both him and others.

One would always have it that ideas that have had a certain success, must have pre-existed in the general feeling of the masses, so that those who have given utterance to them, have only been the interpreters of the universal feeling.

This has often been the case. We have just said that Rousseau had formally proclaimed the existing separation, in men's minds, betwixt civilization and nature.

Historically, therefore, he had truth on his side ; but it is one thing to seize, by the force of observation or of genius, a real fact, and a very different thing to insist, by way of deduction from that fact, on all the consequences that may rigorously be deduced from it. It is not enough that this fact be in the public feeling ; that is not always a reason for the

consequences being there too. One may have wished or may have submitted to the principle, without wishing, nevertheless, and without anywise accepting what a theorist may insist on deducing from it; it is nothing less than a usurpation, and the worst of all usurpations, to represent a generation, a people, as desiring anything beyond what it believes that it desires, when it admits such or such a principle, when it acknowledges such or such a fact. This is in some sort to make an abuse of a signature, by imposing on the person who has given it, a responsibility which he could not foresee, and engaging him to more than he had believed he had engaged for. "How many things he makes me say!" said Socrates, when Plato's smaller writings appeared. "How many things I am made to say!" is what, also, were it not already fascinated and half subjugated by its new masters, every nation would exclaim when people are preparing to drive it into the broad highway of revolutions.

In the success of Rousseau's first publications, accordingly, there were two parts to be assigned, two successes to be distinguished—the one real, the other factitious; that of the man of genius who seizes the actual state of things to the life, and that of the sophist who takes advantage of that state of things, and, aided by other sophists, makes it mean whatever he likes. To start from the truth is nothing, if it be only to arrive at what is false.

Montaigne, before him, had spoken of the untoward influences of the sciences and the arts. Charron,\* following Montaigne, and many others following Charron, had done so likewise, but always as a fact; whereas Rousseau, from the first step he took, transformed that fact into a principle. We see him, thenceforward, pursue quite another road. In vain does he continue to quote Montaigne; quotations, even textual

\* *Traité de la Sagesse*—(Treatise on Wisdom).

ones, are incorrect when dragged in to support a system which was not that of their author; and they are particularly incorrect when the author, as was the case with Montaigne, had really no system, and no wish to have any. It is one thing to throw out here and there a reflection, an epigram, on the uselessness of civilization for the real perfecting of man, and quite another thing to draw up a formal indictment against civilization in general, and to make that the starting-point of an attack against society itself.

Montaigne, besides, had traced out accurately enough the bounds within which he affected to pronounce a malediction on progress. "Science," he says, "is in truth a very useful and a very great quality;\* they who despise it, sufficiently prove their want of sense. But I do not hold it, however, to be of the extreme value that some attribute to it, like Herillus the philosopher, who made it the residence of the sovereign good, and maintained that it was capable of rendering us wise and contented, the which I do not believe; neither that which others have said, that science is the mother of all virtue," &c.† Thus, according to his usual custom, Montaigne confines himself to speaking both for and against, and would have others do the same. He would not have us deify progress; still less would he have us speak nothing but evil of it, for by doing so, says he, "we should only prove our want of sense."

On this point, then, there is the same difference betwixt Montaigne and Rousseau as there would be between two moralists, of whom the one should say that Christianity has not thoroughly ameliorated the human race, while the other should accuse Christianity itself of all our vices and all our errors. This last attack would at least have the merit, speak-

\* *Essays*, Book ii. chap. 12.

† Science is understood in this passage in its widest sense. It means every kind of knowledge and culture.

ing logically, of coming to some conclusion—a deplorable one, indeed, but rigorously correct. “If Christianity be utterly worthless, let us crush it.” This was the position Voltaire laid down, and one sees at least that it had a meaning. But what issue could be given to an indictment against civilization? “Haste to demolish those amphitheatres, break down those marbles, burn those pictures, off with those slaves that subjugate you, and by whose fatal arts you are corrupted.” Here, doubtless, there is a conclusion, as it seems; but it is Fabricius that speaks, and to men who have been dead for more than two thousand years. Rousseau—Rousseau though he was—would not have ventured to have the air of one giving such counsels seriously, and that, too, to the French.

VI.—Compelled, under pain of being only ridiculous, to put away every conclusion of this sort, Rousseau set himself to look about for others.

“See,” says he, “how luxury, dissoluteness of morals, and slavery, have been in all times the chastisement of those haughty efforts which we have made to get out of that blessed ignorance in which eternal wisdom had placed us. The thick veil with which she has covered all her operations, seems to warn us sufficiently that she has not destined us for vain researches.”

Nothing easier than to retort all this, and to say—

That there is no more pride, in reality, in making use of our intellectual faculties, than in making use of our eyes, our hands, and our senses;

That God cannot have condemned us to this *blessed* ignorance, since He puts at our disposal the means of our getting out of it;

That if a thick veil warns us in many cases not to seek to see the bottom, there are also in nature secrets transparent

enough to encourage the belief that we are invited to fathom them;

That the best proof, in fine, of the lawfulness of our researches, is this very thirst for knowledge with which we are all born. "Forasmuch as it hath pleased God to endow us with some capacity of discourse,\* in order that we should not, like the beasts, be slavishly subject to common laws, but should apply ourselves thereto by voluntary judgment and liberty, we ought indeed to lend ourselves a little to the simple authority of nature, but not allow ourselves to be tyrannically carried towards her."† Would not that be the worst of tyrannies which should condemn us, in the name of nature, not to avail ourselves of this *discourse*, this intellectual faculty, which we hold from her equally with our physical faculties?

But Rousseau pursues his way. These answers did not escape his notice; and if they did not make him pause, it was because he had an object to attain. Who can ever admit that he seriously believed himself abandoning nature because he had cultivated his faculties? He proceeds, therefore; he must needs mystify his readers, and still more must he mystify himself, by a conclusion yet more extraordinary than his premisses—"The savage state is the true state of man;" a conclusion which was to form the fundamental position of his discourse on inequality.

Be it well observed, in the first place, that Rousseau's *savage state* is not even the state of those savages which travellers describe in the most melancholy colours. The idea is so prodigiously remote from all that we feel and know, that a man must needs soften it down in spite of himself; one must have this savage, in whom alone Rousseau recognises man, to be on a level at least with those who live in the forests of

\* Reason—*raison*.

† Montaigne, Book ii. chap. 8.



America. Quite a mistake! These last are already too much civilized for Rousseau. They know something of domestic life; they have chiefs. The original equality of mankind is thus violated among them; they are on the fatal slope which leads to the abyss of civilization. Rousseau's savage, his primitive man—*man*, in fine, is an isolated and ferocious being, meeting only by chance beings like himself, to whom we must assume him to be rigorously and always equal in strength; for it is clear, that in such a state of things all inequality of strength would be an inequality of condition. Women and children we must suppose none; for the moment we do that, we have domestic life—we have order, or at least a certain degree of order, that is, of inequality.

To this, be it well understood, does his reasoning carry us back; to this one must necessarily go back, in order logically to reach the same results with his. One step more,—let us not allow ourselves to make him more reasonable than he is, or wishes to be. Let us take his doctrine from himself; let us see it, let us exhibit it in its revolting nakedness. Where are the persons who would persist in declaring themselves his disciples, after being summoned to believe in that which he makes the foundation of his system? "It is of Rousseau," says one of his admirers,\* "that it may truly be said: 'The human race had lost their titles: Jean Jacques has recovered them!'" Thy titles, then, O man! didst thou foolishly imagine that thou didst bear inscribed on that forehead of thine, which looks up to heaven? A mistake!—a mistake! They were below there in the woods, among the acorns which thou didst eat, stupidly bent down like the brutes to the ground which thou wouldst forsooth disdain. A man has been found who has contrived to be eloquent while demonstrating that man ought to have remained an animal, and that whoever

\* Brizard.

thinks "is a depraved animal;" an age has existed that could relish such debasing reveries, and that took a pleasure in mingling them with the refinements of its luxury. Buffon had already glanced at this idea. "A savage, absolutely savage," says he, writing in 1749,\* "would be a curious spectacle to a philosopher.... Possibly he would clearly see that virtue belongs to the savage more than to the civilized man, and that vice had its birth only in society." Let us have, then, this *curious* experience. You may—for an absolutely savage man would no longer be a man—would not have the faculties of man, and you may as well study an ox. What, then, must virtue be—good heavens!—in the ideas of men who would go in quest of it among the brutes?

\* *Des Variétés dans l'Espèce Humaine*—(Of Varieties in Mankind).

## CHAPTER XXIII.

- I.—Rousseau refuted by Voltaire—The crutches of the human race—Man could not but have civilized himself—Savages not more vigorous than we are, but rather less—Montesquieu sneering by anticipation at Rousseau—Why Rousseau was fain to go beyond the field of history—The Spartans.
- II.—The historian ought not to attribute either all to facts or all to principles—How Rousseau arrives at the doctrine of equality—A romance and a vicious circle—Continuation of the romance—A sage who is found to be a monster.
- III.—Society is the work of nobody—Pre-existing affinities—Rousseau denies them—Wolves and monkeys—Speech—Society the work of everybody—A contract exists, but one renewed daily and by all.
- IV.—Property, natural and indestructible instinct—Again a romance—Ask a child, a dog.
- V.—Did Rousseau mean that people should realize his dreams?—He reigned much more by means of the dangerous than by the good side of his doctrines—Rich, poor: how these words are often ill applied—The poor *have meant well*—The rich have promised—Fatal or absurd consequences—These were already to be found in Montesquieu—Attacks on property.

THERE is always some danger, even though we should not fall into such degrading theories, in quitting the field of possible observations; all the more as the things which we go so far in search of are oftenest among those which, would people but content themselves with common sense, they would find quite at hand.

Voltaire, who always showed common sense in opposing those who had none, tried to bring back the question to the domain of facts. "One has written," he said, for example,\*

\* *Essay on Manners*, chap. viii

“that the savage state is the true state of man, and that ever since our quitting that state we have done nothing but miserably degenerate. I do not believe that that solitary life, which our fathers are said to have led, is in human nature. We are, if I am not mistaken, in the first rank, if one may be allowed to say so, of those animals that live in troops, like bees, ants, poultry, sheep, &c. Should a man meet a single wandering bee, ought he to conclude that that bee is in a state of pure nature, and that those that are working in the hive have degenerated?”

“Society,” replied Rousseau,\* “is natural to mankind as decrepitude is to the individual. Nations need arts, laws, governments, as old people need crutches.”

This is an ingenious get-off; but one would need to begin by proving that the human race was old when it set about making these *crutches*, and this is what Rousseau proves only by plunging into those old primitive epochs which no past time attests, and which the present belies. If man was born long ago as we see him born now, he must have been incapable of not beginning forthwith to become what he is. Even were we to admit that the grand affair, for man, in this world, is to preserve and increase his corporeal strength, it would still remain to be seen whether the savage state is most favourable to it. Rousseau supposes this to be incontestable, evident;—is it so? Savages may be stronger men than our lazy idlers, but are less, ay, much less, vigorous than our working men. In a personal encounter, you would not have fair play; in a piece of continuous labour you are sure of fatiguing and vanquishing them. In you, therefore, there is a higher amount of force and energy; all that the savage has more than you is that he could, in a given moment, give out more at once. Then, if there are powerful men among them,

\* Lettre à M. Philopolis (Bonnet).

there are also weak, and if some have been found to fight like tigers, some also have been found to flee, were they a thousand, before one of those beings whom civilization, we are told, has made so diminutive and contemptible.

"I never heard public law spoken of," Montesquieu had already said, "without people beginning sedulously to inquire into the origin of societies, and this to me seemed ridiculous. If men did not form them—if they forsook and fled from one another, one would have needed to ask the reason for this, and to inquire why they remain apart; but they are all born into the world with ties binding them together. A son is born near his father and keeps himself there; here is society, and the cause of society." Nothing could be said better; and it is curious enough to hear the *Spirit of Laws* proclaim by anticipation that the lucubrations which were to form the basis of Rousseau's whole system are ridiculous.

We are told, "It was his imagination that carried him away beyond known times." Yes; but why? We will venture to say it; if he was so fond of travelling beyond the bounds of history, it was because his knowledge of it was small and incorrect. Much has been said about the happiness he felt, when a child, in reading Plutarch. We might ask, perhaps, if the fact be quite certain, if Rousseau had always such a character for sincerity as that we cannot fairly suspect him of having appropriated to himself a trait previously attributed to very many great men. But let us admit the fact, and still we might ask what it proves. A man may be fond of history without being anywise a proficient in it; one may be fond of Plutarch, so very readable a book, and yet have no love for history in the grave and philosophical sense of that word. Had Rousseau any love for it? Did he seriously study it? No. He knew of it only what everybody knew, and what everybody, like himself, had read in Plutarch

and Montaigne. The details that can be made, well or ill, to enter into the developments of his system, he appropriates; the general whole, which would prove his condemnation, he has either been unable to seize, or he has voluntarily left in the shade. The Spartans, for example, serve his purpose as the Chinese served that of Voltaire. Having found among them some traits of his repulsive ideal of a free people, forthwith we find the Spartans themselves become the ideal, and he speaks of "that republic of demigods rather than of men." But history, even when arranged according to his views, still thwarts and embarrasses him; he is never at his ease until he gets beyond it.

II.—It is true, that Montesquieu had generally fallen, in appearance at least, into the contrary excess. While Rousseau felt most complacency in times anterior to history, it is from history alone, as we have seen, that Montesquieu affects to demand, step by step, his theories, and he is often led to make her say either more or less than she does say. Now, although the field of history be that in which there is least risk of one's losing himself, the historian ought to be capable of quitting it at times, in order to go back to higher principles which may have been extinguished there, to recall men—I do not say to a state of nature, of which we know nothing—but to those natural truths which every man that thinks may find and may control in himself. Say not that there was once a time in which men were equal in point of fact, for that would be but to make a romance; say that they are equal, in point of right, before nature and before God, and all will be obliged to agree with you.

But how could people be content to repeat, in the middle of the eighteenth century, what Christianity had so long been saying—what was preached last Sunday from the pulpit?

Something novel and startling was wanted. Rousseau imagined he might adopt the same course in politics that those take in morals, who, to recommend virtue, exhibit it in a romance. But as the picture of primitive inequality, lowered perforce to that of bestial life, could not have been brought out, however inadequately, without teeming with repulsive and hideous details, Rousseau confined himself to depicting the evils which have resulted, in his opinion, from the transition to another state.

Equality once broken, says he, was followed by the most frightful disorders. *Followed!* This is exactly to assume what is in question, namely, that the savage state was one of order, justice, and peace. "The usurpations of the rich," he goes on to say, "the robberies committed by the poor, the unbridled passions of all . . . rendered men greedy, ambitious, and mischievous." Thus it is not greed, ambition and wickedness that introduced the disorders; it is the disorders themselves that introduced those vices.

Here at once we find ourselves in a circle. The disorders, according to him, were the source of the vices; and yet without the vices, how are we to account for the disorders? There must thus have been, to commence this change, usurpers without ambition and robbers without wickedness or greed. All that the author makes out to have been done posterior to society, and to have been engendered by it, evidently, on the other hand, preceded it,—in fact, rendered it necessary. Living in a state of equality and without vices, would men have ever made for themselves chiefs and laws?

But the romance continues. "Utterly without valid reasons for justifying himself . . . the rich man, under the pressure of necessity, conceived at last the most considerate project that ever entered into the human mind; that of employing in his favour the very forces of those that were attacking him, of

inspiring them with other maxims, and giving them other institutions which should be as favourable to him as natural right was against him." Thereupon he calls together his friends and his neighbours. "Let us now unite," he says to them—we continue to quote Rousseau—"for the purpose of guarding the weak from oppression, of restraining the ambitious, and securing to every one the possession of what belongs to him. Let us institute regulations of justice and peace, which may repair, in some sort, the caprices of fortune, by equally subjecting the powerful and the weak to the obligation of mutual duties. Instead of turning our energies against ourselves, let us combine them altogether in one supreme government, to rule over us according to wise laws, to protect and defend all the members of the association, repulse the common enemies, and maintain eternal concord among us."

All this is excellent, do you proceed to say? and if this assembly, as is more than probable, was never held, here, however, there is all that might best have been said, in point alike of its wisdom and of its being strictly based on the instincts and the necessities of man.

Yes, say you? Well then, proceed. This man, who appears to you to be so entirely in the right, Rousseau makes out to be a monster of hypocrisy and injustice. It is he who founds society; it is he who is capable of all the evils, of all the vices that society is to bring forth; for it is he who has led men into the criminal folly of sacrificing one part of their liberty for the sake of preserving the rest, "as a wounded man would allow an arm to be cut off to save the rest of his body."

You proceed, perhaps, further to object, obstinate person that you are, that this wounded man is not in the wrong, that those who recommended, and the surgeon who performed the operation, were nowise his enemies. You are mistaken.



True friends would rather have allowed him to die than have condemned him to dispense with the loss of one his members. Such, at least, is the meaning—if it have any meaning—of Rousseau's comparison; such is the signification, if they are to be taken seriously, of the reproaches he heaps on the founders of civil society.

III.—But he ought at least to have, first of all, examined whether it ever had any founders.

Who is it that could have entertained the pernicious idea of combining two gases, so as to form water, that water which sometimes commits such ravages? Who is it that could have invented fire, that frightful artisan of so many evils? Do you smile? Well then, society has been just as little invented as water or fire. It arose spontaneously, in virtue of pre-existing affinities.

But Rousseau denies these affinities. "One sees," he says, "from the little care that nature has taken to bring men together by means of their mutual wants, and to facilitate for them the use of speech, how little she has done in the way of preparing them for sociability, and how little she has contributed in all that they have done for the establishment of its ties. It is impossible to imagine wherefore, *in that primitive state*, one man should need the aid of another man, any more than a monkey or a wolf that of another of its kind.

Yes, *in that primitive state*, in the state Rousseau has described, that of wolves and monkeys. But those wolves and monkeys are still in that state; in it they will evidently always be. If man was ever in it, wherefore has he quitted it? The fact of his being no longer in it is the best and most complete proof, either that he was destined to quit it, or, better still, that he never was in it, and never could have been in it.

The same remark applies to what Rousseau has said of speech. Nature, according to him, has done little to facilitate for us the use of it. On the contrary, when we see language already perfect in ages when civilization had hardly commenced, in ancient India, for example, or in Greece, in Homer's time—the sole means, I will not say of explaining, but of throwing any light on the problem of its formation, is to admit that nature had given men a prodigious aptitude for this work. Without travelling beyond individual facts of everyday occurrence, if one but thinks how much a child of three years of age already knows, not only of words but of forms and rules, without having ever made any appreciable effort to retain them in its memory—one sees plainly enough that there is no kind of progress to which we are more certainly predestined.

If society be the work of everybody, then there is injustice and falsehood in throwing upon certain men a responsibility with which all, by the very fact of their being men and of their having within them those original affinities, are perforce invested at every moment of their lives. There does, in fact, exist the contract that Rousseau speaks of. This only we deny, that it was made at any certain epoch, after calculating consequences, and between two classes of men. It was every day and among all that it was primitively concluded, for it is every day and among all that we see it still concluded. Whoever submits to work for wages, has by so doing acknowledged the lawfulness of all fortune acquired by labour. Whoever draws a profit, without labour, from a value previously acquired, admits the lawfulness of capital. He that sells has recognised property acquired by commerce. He who accepts for himself the protection of the laws, submits to their chastisements in the event of his making an attempt on another's life or property. Whosoever, in fine, does not mean that the

liberty of others shall be full and entire with respect to him, renounces having his own liberty full and entire with respect to them. This is genuine equality, for it is reciprocity. Such is the contract perpetually subscribed with the one hand by the very men who tear it to pieces with the other.

IV.—But Rousseau persists in converting into precise, individual, deliberately pondered acts, all those instinctive and reciprocal facts which go collectively to form the social state.

Hence those famous lines: "The first man who, after enclosing a piece of ground, thought of saying, *This is mine*, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society."

No. The true founder of civil society was He who thought fit, in His wisdom, that those *simple folks* should believe what was told them, and that they should be believed themselves when they said as much.

See what Rousseau is obliged to add, in order to obtain currency for his idea, which he is well aware is no less contrary to the instincts of nature than to the laws of the civilization which he attacks. "How many crimes," says he, "how many wars, miseries, murders, and horrors, would that man have spared the human race who, pulling up the stakes or filling up the ditch, would have called to his fellows, 'Beware of listening to that impostor! You are lost if you forget that the fruits belong to all, and the earth to nobody.'"

Then is it not so? If all things belong to all—if no law, no force, determines the use of them, there can be no more disorders, no more crimes.

Could Rousseau have really thought so? Is this one point more on which his imagination is our warranty for his good faith, and on which we might say that he deceives himself but does not lie? We would rather decline giving an answer.

Sincere or not, he has curiously refuted himself in one of the notes of that same discourse. "The savage man," he says, "when he has dined, is at peace with universal nature and the friend of all his fellow-men."

Yes, *when he has dined*. And when he has not dined? Think you that the man who shall have acted well and wisely, you say, in pulling up my stakes and levelling my ditch, in depriving me of the land which I appropriated by my labour upon it—think you that that man, if he be hungry, will respect in my hands the fruits I shall only have had the trouble of collecting? And bear this in mind, that he will always be hungry, for without cultivation the earth would not support the twentieth part of the human race. In order to his becoming, in dining, "the friend of all his fellow-men," he will often have to begin by eating one of them.

"Ask," says Voltaire, "a child, without education, but who shall have begun to reason and to speak, whether the grain that a man has sown in his field belongs to him, and whether the robber that has killed its owner has a legitimate right to that field. You will see if the child will not reply as all the earth's legislators have done."\*

Need we even wait till the child shall have begun to reason and to speak? Look at him as soon as he has enough of will to appropriate an object, were it only by touching it, and say whether he have not the sentiment of property as positive, as clear, as he will have at the age of reason.

And why even go to the child? Before denying the idea of property, teach your dog then not to defend, at the peril of his life, what he knows to belong to you, were it even the stick that you use in beating him.

V.—It is not many years since people laughed at them—

\* *Essay on Manners*, chap. vii.

selves when they set about refuting Rousseau's opinion on these matters. It seemed like conjuring up phantoms for the mere pleasure of giving them battle.

But these phantoms have now taken to themselves a body. Rousseau's paradoxes have become the principles of a sect whose domination, did it last but for a day, would subvert everything and bring back chaos.

Did he really desire that the day should come when men would set themselves to give effect to his counsels?

This is a question which he ought to have put to himself, but which he does not appear to have put to himself. His assertions at times are neither more nor less than commands, which mischievous or silly people alone, he seems to think, can dream of resisting; at other times, and indeed still more frequently, he seems under the impression that men are no longer capable of obeying him. He has even more than once gone so far as openly to dissuade from the realization of his ideas. Must we forgive him, on that account, for the mischief they have done and may yet do? A truly wise man would have known that it serves no purpose, in a book, to place beside the poison a warning not to use it, seeing that there are always people who take the poison and trouble themselves no farther. Out of twenty of Rousseau's disciples, nineteen have come to be so from having imbibed what is dangerous in his doctrines, for one that has come to be so from having imbibed what is good in them, and that confines himself to seeing in him the author of the eloquent protestations against the materialism of his age. We shall ere long see what these very protestations amount to.

And has he not sown with lavish hands the poison which so many were sure to choose in preference to the antidote? How gratified did he seem at depositing in the bosom of society all the germs of trouble and anarchy!

See, first of all, this division of men into the poor and the rich. It is absolute, inexorable. Here, those who have ; there, those who have not. Two camps, two armies, two worlds.

There are the rich, it is true ; people who cannot reasonably decline the responsibility which that title involves. There are the poor, it is also true, and perhaps still more true. But between these two extremes, how many degrees ! How many thousands, how many millions of persons would you have to range in one or other of the two bands, according as the boundary line should find its place below or above them ! How many circumstances, besides, would have to be taken into account irrespective of pecuniary calculations ! The robust workman is rich in comparison with the weak and the sickly one ; he who has work is rich in comparison with him who has none. The same man will be twenty times rich and poor in the same day, according as he shall have successively had to do with richer or poorer persons than himself ; he will have had to experience by turns, unless morally raised above such wretched feelings, both the gnawings of envy and the pleasing consciousness of an admitted superiority. This is what Rousseau forgets, and what those like him forget, who are interested in maintaining the division into two camps, that is to say, maintaining permanent envy and hatred, war everywhere and among all. Accordingly, be it observed, it is always from this intermediate class that the signal for murmurs proceeds. The poor, the truly poor, is infinitely less disposed to look above his head than the greater number of those who, to say the least, are rich in comparison of him. For one man whom people see, or think they see, placed above themselves on this sliding scale, they forget that there are hundreds below ; or if they remember it, it is only that they may league themselves with them. Sensible, in reality, that

they have little cause for complaint, they hasten to make common cause with the real sufferers. Hence those appeals, hence those pictures surcharged with the most lamentable colours, and the first result of which is to chase away any little happiness left to those of whom they have constituted themselves the organs.

See, further, how absolute everything is in the picture of the relations which, according to Rousseau, have subsisted between the two categories.

We shall not return to that famous meeting at which the rich man—who it seems already existed—made so shrewd and so profoundly treacherous a speech. That speech, it would appear, was followed by a very orderly taking of the votes—for one would say that Rousseau must have had the minutes of the proceedings before him.

“When the poor,” says he,\* “gave their consent to some being rich, the rich undertook to nourish all who had no livelihood to depend upon either from their own property or from their work.”

*The poor consented!* And what right could they have had to oppose the gradual increase of a fortune honourably begun and honourably augmented? Whether there was a contract or not, property was prior in point of date, and existed independently. Never, until Rousseau appeared, did the poor imagine they made a concession in acknowledging the rights of property, and if any deny those rights at the present day, it is because they have been taught to do so. They will never be so readily taught, besides, that they renounce those rights for themselves, and mean that that road which they would shut to others, shall be shut also to them.

The rich *undertook!* Ever the contract; ever that kind of conference to which people came, one part already rich, the

\* *Emile*, Book ii.

other with their minds made up apparently to their never being so, seeing they considered themselves as having no common interest with the rich. Seriously, is it upon fictions that one can reasonably base matters of such gravity as these?

But be it so. The rich undertook. And to do what? "*To nourish all who*" . . . &c. If they undertook that, they would have done more harm to the whole human race than their hardheartedness could have done good to a certain number, for they would have given a deathblow to activity and energy; they would have established, in a much more trenchant manner than has ever been done in the present system, the division of men into rich and poor, into masters and slaves.

But Rousseau does not trouble himself about consequences. Perish society rather than one of those principles to which, from dispute to dispute, as he said, he allowed himself to be carried! "Would you give consistence to the State?" you find him say.\* "Then bring the two extremes as much together as possible. Tolerate neither opulence nor beggary." Happy that country, in fact, where the *mediocritas aurea* should be the condition of everybody! Nothing better than that the legislator should do his utmost to prevent the accumulation of overgrown wealth; but to maintain that he has the right to prevent it, that he is entitled *not to tolerate* people living in affluence, this amounts to saying again, under a new form, that the right of property is a conceded right (*droit octroyé*); it amounts, consequently, to a denial of it, and instead of "giving consistency to the State," it is tantamount to depriving it of all consistency:

But Montesquieu, under graver forms, has opened but too wide a door to analogous consequences.

"The State," he has said,† "owes to all the citizens an

\* *Contrat Social*.

† *Spirit of Laws*, Book xxiii.



assured subsistence, food, suitable clothing, and a kind of life not incompatible with health."

If these last words have a meaning at all, they involve the abolition of a great many trades; if the first have any, they involve, for a host of persons, idleness erected into a principle and almost into a dogma.

At least, does he not go the length—and we must give him credit for it, since so many absurdities have been in vogue—the length of that famous *right to labour* which is so ardently called for in our days, particularly by those who are least desirous of taking advantage of it? Even when in error he had too much good sense to demand what was evidently palpably impossible.

But no more than Rousseau does he put property beyond and above the laws. If he does not attack it by sallies of passion, he undermines it by deplorable concessions. What is it, what does it become, if the State *owes* to all *citizens* what Montesquieu maintains to be their due? I may feel myself, as a Christian and as a man, held under great obligations; but if I am obliged, by force of law, to feed my neighbour as long as he cannot or will not work, my goods are his as well as mine, and property has ceased to exist.

"Natural law," he further says,\* "ordains that parents shall support their children; but does not oblige them to make them their heirs."

A father might, no doubt, according to natural law, disinherit his children; but this he can do precisely because he has, according to that same law, the absolute proprietorship of his goods. Must we hence conclude that transmission to children is not a matter of natural law? This, nevertheless, is what Montesquieu teaches. He confounds the re-partition of parents' goods with their transmission,

\* *Spirit of Laws*, Book xxvi.

and from the fact that society can and ought to regulate the former, he concludes that the latter is equally founded on the laws. Now, what the laws have established they may abolish. With Montesquieu's book in his hand, the legislator might decide that children should not inherit from their fathers, or inherit only in virtue of the law.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

- I.—The Economists—Illusions—The Science—The Master—Madame de Marchais—The Abbé de Besplas—Our St. Simonians.
- II.—Political economy—Algebra and mysticism—Potatoes—Death to wheat!—Regeneration and felicity by means of *soupe au caillou*—Are we much wiser?—The tail with an eye—The Socialists.
- III.—Quesnay—His dreams—His society—His dinners—Louis XV. a printer—The Capuchins of the *Encyclopédie*—It disowns them, and rails at them—Their chimeras reappear under other forms—Condorcet—Life prolonged indefinitely, and virtue indefinitely powerful—Quarrels among the Economists.
- IV.—How little these matters were understood—The chicken in the pot—*Rex fecit*—Progress of economical errors—They are of old date—Preachers—Massillon—Question of luxury—What contributed to its being ill understood—Rousseau's sallies—As many errors as words—All that bears on luxury is relative—Diogenes.
- V.—*Saint* Industry the successor of *Saint* Agriculture—What did all the mountains in labour bring forth?—It is not enough to love the people, we must know how to love them.

LET US now see how, in the eighteenth century, it fared with those ideas which have reappeared in our days with so much audacity, and so much success.

First of all, from the very circumstance that they involved in reality an appeal to violence, an encouragement to the most brutal passions, their abettors felt how much need there was of veiling them under abstract, sentimental, and even mystical formulas.

This was not always a matter of calculation. The greater number of the economists were among the first to be seduced by that charity which superabounded in their writings. Men

who went on these subjects as far, and even farther, than Rousseau, were the most shocked and the most grieved of any at his inexorable crudeness. Apostles of materialism, they wished that people should at least avoid calling it by that name; and they believed they had found, betwixt the savage state and civilisation, a certain middle course, in which man was to recover all that he had lost, and keep all that he had gained. Accordingly, they called their science *the Science*, and Quesnay, their master, *the Master*. A woman, Madame de Marchais, the friend of Madame de Pompadour, preached up Quesnay as Madame de Chatelet had preached up Newton. But she had more wit and grace than Voltaire's old friend. "She enchanted," says Garat,\* those whom she did not convert." The pulpit was open to the dreams of the new mystics, for those preachers who had little faith thus found something new to say—they had materialism to dress out, without much difficulty, in Christianity and morals. When the Abbé de Besplas, in 1775, was appointed to preach before the Academy, his panegyric on Saint Louis turned out to be a long address on political economy, with a long apostrophe, in which he exclaimed, "Holy agriculture!" It might have been taken for a preface to the almanacs in which the old saints were to be replaced by *cabbage*, *beetroot*, or *carrot*. The adepts were carried away by genuine enthusiasm. "The moment that those doctrines—which people called political, but which they would willingly have called religious—made their appearance in the almost hieroglyphical language of Dr. Quesnay, it happened to the economists as it had happened to Pygmalion: they fell upon their knees before their own work, they worshipped it, they no longer wrote anything but hymns."†

Thus, too, it will be recollected, our St. Simonians, our

\* *Mémoires sur la Vie de Suard*—(Memoirs on the Life of Suard).

† Garat. *Ibid.*

primitive socialists, did. They, too, genuine enthusiasts as they were, felt the need of veiling with the poetry of the words the empty nakedness of the things; they too were the first to be seduced. Next, the things themselves had to be told. The ultimate conclusion of these charitable utopianisms is the reign of force, it is socialism, it is communism, it is the whole of what we have come at last to be openly threatened with, together with specimens that leave no doubt as to what the realization of these menaces would be.

II.—Political economy had, accordingly, commenced its course with promises of happiness and plenty. Just as chemistry and alchemy were long confounded, and there was no difference, or little, between the astronomer and the astrologer,—so, at this epoch, there was nobody as yet who could distinguish with any clearness, in this new science, the field of realities from that of dreams. The driest calculations were oddly mingled with childish aspirations after that Eden which people fancied they had all but reached. The most practical ameliorations became ridiculous, and were thought impossible—thanks to the emphatic promises that people hastened imprudently to attach to them. One of the causes, for example, of the long discredit into which potatoes fell was, that instead of eating them as neither more nor less than potatoes, they were advertised as bread. They were to furnish, it was said, a more abundant, more wholesome, and more savoury bread than that in ordinary use, and at an infinitely cheaper rate; they were, in fine, to dethrone wheat. Their *panification* was for twenty years the dream, the philosopher's stone of the French economists.

But they went far beyond this. They maintained that they saw the moment at hand when, by means of new processes, everything might be made to serve for the alimenta-

tion of man. That same depraved imagination which, in the bosom of social refinements, had turned a willing ear to the appeals that were made to a life of savage brutality, now did its best to celebrate, amid the refined luxury of Parisian suppers, the happy epoch in which people were to have discovered the art of getting fat on grass, wood—mayhap even on pebbles. Agriculture itself, though deified at first, was slandered as the source of civilisation, and the first step in the career of servile subjection. Wheat—wheat especially—became the object of the bitterest ill-will. Linguet, in his *Annals of the Eighteenth Century*, declaimed with much warmth against the use of bread. Mercier, in his *Picture of Paris*, approves and amplifies all that Linguet had said. "Wheat," says he, "which nourishes man, has been at the same time his executioner;" for it is from the cultivation of wheat that all social inequalities and iniquities spring. Those lawgivers of the olden time well knew what they were about, when they placed on their altars wheat and civilisation as personified in Ceres; they had come to see that there was no better method of keeping men down, and securing the power of tyrants. "I know not," says Mercier, "how far I may be mistaken in my ideas; but I am of opinion that chemistry will one day be able to extract a nutritive principle from all bodies, and that it will be as easy for man then to provide for his subsistence as it is for him now to draw water from the rivers." The earth, accordingly, will again become the terrestrial paradise. Everybody having wherewithal to eat, there will be an end to quarrels and enmities. "What will become of those combats caused by pride, by ambition, by avarice, and all those cruel institutions of great empires? An easy and abundant supply of food placed at man's disposal, will be the pledge of his tranquillity and of his virtues." The author forgets to tell us what people will then have to occupy them, and

whether idleness of itself will not be a source of vice equivalent to all the rest; he forgets, especially, to inform us whether these precious cooked meats of wood and pebbles will be thought quite as savoury as fowl and beef, for otherwise we might be perverse enough to continue our preference for this criminal fare, at the risk of perpetuating all the woes that flow from it.

Such were the conclusions people came to, and with the most perfect sincerity. Mercier, notwithstanding, was very far from being an enthusiast or a dreamer. "The economists are no more, alas! I have seen them rise, wrangle, shine, starve us, and disappear." His "Picture of Paris" (*Tableau de Paris*), in which he launches this shaft at them, is full of just ideas and cutting criticisms; it is the work, moreover, of an avowed infidel. But there is nothing like a man's being incredulous in religion for making him credulous in other things; like that atheist to whom Piron, when converted, said—"If you don't believe, it is from no want of faith." Have we not had this in our own days, and have we not had examples enough of it? Let us set aside, if you will, the follies of the St. Simonians, the dreams of Fourier, and the famous *queue à œil* (tail with an eye), which he has promised mankind.\* Look at socialism as it is. To view it as aught else than an immense pillage, to believe in the perfect results and the felicity which it pretends that it will bring with it, there must be on the part of reason an abdication far more complete than before the highest mysteries of faith. And yet there are persons who make this strange abdication—there are sincere socialists.

### III.—Quesnay, the chief of the economists, did not run

\* This tail has been so often represented in caricatures, that people have got the idea at last of its having been an invention of certain wags. This is a mistake; Fourier has spoken of it in his books, and more than one Fourierist has believed in it.

into the follies that others proceeded to preach after him ; but he prepared the way for them by the absolute confidence he felt in his principles. Quesnay would have been the man to run about the streets of Versailles, calling out the " I have found it " of Archimedes. Marmontel had seen much of him, and describes him well. " Occupying rather confined apartments in the *entre sol*\* of the house of Madame de Pompadour, whose physician he was, he was engrossed from morning to night with political and moral economy. He believed that he had reduced it to calculations and axioms that could be proved by irresistible evidence. As for me, I applied my whole mind to the conception of truths which he set before me as evident, and I saw nothing in them but vagueness and obscurity. . . . I listened to him with patient docility ; I gave him ground to hope that he might at length enlighten me and inculcate his doctrines on me. . . . While storms were brewing and dissipating themselves below his *entre sol*, he would continue scribbling away at his calculations, as indifferent to those movements of the court as if he had been a hundred leagues off. While deliberations were going on below about peace, about war, about the choice of generals, about the dismissal of ministers, we in the *entre sol* would be reasoning about agriculture, calculating net produce ; or sometimes," adds Marmontel—and here we have that age again before us—" we gaily dined with Diderot, D'Alembert, Duclos, Helvetius, Turgot, Buffon ; and Madame de Pompadour, unable to prevail on this herd of philosophers to come down into her drawing-room, would come herself and join them at table." Louis XV. likewise had acquired a taste, or had

\* From the peculiar construction of large houses in France, with a court in the centre, entered by an arched carriage-way, the level of the flooring immediately above that arched entrance is necessarily too high for one and yet too low for two suites of rooms of average height of ceiling. The upper, therefore, is made much *below* the average in height, and called *l'entre sol*.—*Trans.*



allowed himself to be persuaded that he had acquired a taste, for Quesnay's doctrines. He gave him a patent of nobility, and for arms *a pansy in a field of gold*. When he took it into his head, as a means of ridding himself a little of his incurable ennui, of having a small printing press, and being himself the printer, it was on a manuscript of Quesnay's that he wrought. But the king printed it, said Quesnay, as a printer, that is to say, without reading it.

The *Encyclopédie*, it will be seen, was largely represented in that *entre sol*, and it listened, patiently enough, to the long sermons of the master. But what it forgave in Quesnay, a superior man, who gave besides good dinners, and had much influence with the Marchioness, it found ere long that it could not tolerate in his disciples, among whom, it must be confessed, there were more fools than men of talent. After having adopted them with no small affection, it repudiated them with great disdain. They got the name, in public, of the Capuchins of the *Encyclopédie*, but the *Encyclopédie* had no great liking for Capuchins, whatever dress they wore. Their political mysticism could hardly suit a school which gave the name of mysticism in religion, that they might the better ridicule it at their ease, to every kind of piety and faith. "A sect arose some time ago," wrote Grimm in 1770, "which though at first as humble as the dust it was made of, as poor as its doctrines, as obscure as its style, became ere long imperious and arrogant. . . Several of our brethren are suspected of having in secret had some inclination to make common cause with those empty pates, who for some time past have shed over the kingdom so sombre and disagreeable a hue, that had heaven withdrawn from us the Paraclete of Ferney, we should infallibly have fallen into the spleen, into the jaundice, into a condition worse than death."

But we at once see in these words something else than

common sense venting its indignation against chimeras. It is the Voltairian spirit, the Paraclete of Ferney, as Grimm calls it, sharpening itself with delight against everything that looked like serious conviction. One had to laugh and pull down; to look grave, and to speak of reconstructing, would soon have made a man be thrown off. "I am aware," he adds, "that people say: These sectaries are worthy persons. Their zeal for the public good is consuming them. They are tiresome; they are fantastical; nobody reads them, nobody listens to them; they ought, therefore, to have the support of persons better worth than themselves. *Ventre Saint Gris!* how long is it since it has been thought no great merit for a man to be honest and to hold a quill? To genius alone be eternal honours ever paid! . . . Were we as great distillers as M. Lecomte, vinegar-manufacturer to the king, I would defy you to extract a single drop of genius from all the apocalypses of the Quesnays, the Mirabeaus, the Larivières, and all the commentaries of Baudeau, Roubaud, Dupont de Nemours, and other economist fry." He might have joined to these Condorcet, whom we see, a few years later, resume the dreams of his forerunners, only under forms a little modified. In his "Picture of the Advances of the Human Mind" (*Tableau des progrès de l'esprit humain*): "The advances made by preservative medicine," he said, "having acquired an augmented efficacy from those made by reason and social order, ought to make transmissible maladies disappear at last. . . . *It were not difficult to prove* that this hope may be extended to all other maladies." And he then announces an epoch when men will die only of old age. But this is not enough. Old age even will have its effects indefinitely postponed. "No doubt man will not become immortal; but the interval between birth and death 'may be unceasingly increased.' If I reach the age of a hundred and fifty, why should not my son reach

that of a hundred and sixty, and my grandson a hundred and eighty?" But what is still finer, is that, in indefinitely prolonging his existence here below, man is also to become indefinitely better. "The degree of virtue which he may one day attain, is to us as inconceivable as the degree to which the force of genius may be carried. Who knows but that the time will come when our interests and our passions will have no more influence on the judgments that direct the will, than we see them exercising at present on our scientific opinions, and when every act invasive of another's rights, will be as physically impossible as an act of barbarous cruelty, committed in cold blood, would be to most of us at the present day?" Thus did Condorcet dream, and that too in 1790, on the very eve of those horrors which he was so soon to deplore with tears of blood.

But the economists, meanwhile, had been well laughed at. Ridicule had been thrown likewise on the divisions which had ere long exhibited themselves in the school. Two newspapers, the *Citizen's Ephemerides* and the *Economical Journal*, regularly tore each other to pieces. The one, under the direction of M. Forbonnais, preached up agriculture; the other, directed by M. de Grace, extolled commerce and industry. There could have been nothing more easy, one would think, than to unite these two causes—for who doubts that every state needs both agriculture and commerce? but it was with these questions as in the debate about music, and each exalted his own ideas so much above all the rest, each shouted so lustily: "For those who don't agree with me there is no salvation!" that all had necessarily to declare for the one side or the other, unless, indeed, a man thought best to laugh at them all.

IV.—Genius did not abound in their writings; but it

abounded hardly more in what, on those matters, was written by authors in high repute. One scarcely dare say to what a degree Montesquieu, Rousseau, the whole *Encyclopédie*, showed themselves inexperienced and feeble in regard to them.

All, in particular, exaggerated enormously the influence which a government might exercise on the production of wealth, on individual and general wellbeing. The famous chicken in the pot which Henry IV. had promised all the peasantry of his kingdom, as what they were to have at least on Sunday—the public writers of the eighteenth century thought that every king might promise as well as he. They never inquired whether Henry IV., had he reigned a hundred years, would have been able to make good his promise. Kings, chiefs in general, are, in their eyes, responsible for all the sufferings and all the faults of the people. This Montesquieu teaches indirectly in twenty different places; Rousseau directly and everywhere. He admires a certain Chinese usage, according to which, if we are to believe what he says, when a province revolts, it is the governor that is punished.\* D'Alembert, in his *éloge* on the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, owns that his projects are idle dreams, but lays the blame on sovereigns. "The misfortune of these metaphysical projects for the good of the people, is," says he, "their assuming that all princes are equitable and moderate." He never seems to imagine for a moment that among the people too there may be the elements of injustice and violence, and the good Abbé suspected this as little. La Harpe, in his *éloge* on Fénelon, says that except in the case of mortality, or of famine caused by loss of crops, those who govern them are in fault. Voltaire, though generally far more circumspect, proposed nothing less than to put below a print representing beggars: *Rex fecit*.

No doubt the king did make beggars, and the error was

\* *Lettres de la Montagne*—(Letters from the Hill)—Letter viii.

excusable perhaps in the presence of so much dissipation and so many abuses. But one would fain find among the authors of that time some efforts at least to distinguish what does in fact depend on governments, from what lies beyond the sphere of their action. One would rather not see philosophers open, from want of serious inquiry, those abysses of recrimination and revenge. The idea had made such progress that we see the Parliament of Paris, in 1775, in an *arrêt* against the assemblages that had been occasioned by the dearth of provisions, add that it would beseech the king "to cause the price of bread to be lowered." These imprudent and absurd words compelled Louis XVI. to annul what the Parliament had done; but the people, and even many who were not of the people, were only all the more convinced that there was no desire to alleviate the public calamities.

Another question that was ill understood by the economists, and especially by Rousseau, was that of luxury.

Here, we must confess, men who were anything but revolutionists, had preceded them long before. Often named in the pulpit, luxury had there been the object of many invectives; just invectives perhaps, and yet not always so, if viewed in the light of Christianity, but often highly absurd in the economic point of view. Bossuet, Bourdaloue, Massillon, and a thousand besides, had represented as stolen from the poor all the money consecrated to equipages, sumptuous clothing, festivities, jewels, &c. These declamations, although not attended with any danger at the time, could not have been without some influence on the long covert development of the ideas that were ultimately to make such havoc in society. When men are to be taught a lesson, the essential matter is not be eloquent but to be true. Now, was Massillon true when he lent the aids of his eloquence to the idle and lazy beggar, and made him say to the rich man, "What do you

reproach me for? An idle life, and useless and vagrant morals? But what are the cares that occupy you in your opulence? . . . I may be a useless servant; are not you yourself an unfaithful servant? . . . I ought not to eat, say you, for I do not work; but have you yourself any dispensation from that law? . . . God will judge betwixt you and me, and before His dread tribunal it will be seen whether your voluptuousness and your profusion were more to be permitted in you than the harmless artifice of which I have availed myself as a means of finding relief to my sufferings." Then, because the rich are to blame for plunging into effeminacy, there is nothing worse than a *harmless* artifice in a man's passing himself off as miserably poor, sick, or maimed, in order to extort alms from their sympathy.

It is idle to say that reasonings of this kind may have some foundation in truth; they are only the more false in practice, for there are persons interested in drawing only false consequences from them. Massillon has been but too often, in these matters, the precursor of the worst that has been said and done after him.

Thus, to return to the subject of luxury, nothing better than that you should ask the rich to give less to worldly vanities and more to the poor; but to condemn luxury in general, is to condemn those who live by it to augment the numbers of the poor, and to receive as alms what they might have received as wages. The demands of luxury ought not to make us forget those who are starving; but the best and the most moral of alms, is work. Have you the wherewithal to employ in really useful labours all the working arms of a country? Then do that; but if arms superabound, you will always do far better by asking them to supply the toys of luxury than by feeding them while half employed or doing nothing at all.

It is true that in the eighteenth century that superabundance of arms, which has in our days become the capital embarrassment of governments, was unknown, especially in France. Agriculture suffered from the want of them, at least in some provinces. The growing size of the towns was a positive calamity to the rural districts. The Academy, in 1769, had proposed as the subject for a poetical prize essay, *The Inconveniences of Luxury*; and the court, in 1770, seemed as if it wished to justify all the declamations of the competitors. The Dauphin's marriage was the occasion of incredible follies. The nobility ruined themselves,—the king, who had been ruined long before, setting the example. "What think you of these *fêtes*?" said he one day to the Comptroller General. "Ah! Sire," said the Abbé Terray, "I think them *unpayable*!" But that same abbé, severe as he was, not the less had a mansion built for himself in Paris which all the world went to see, and the magnificence of which threw Versailles itself into the shade.

But while the friends of luxury ran into such ridiculous excesses, its enemies fell into exaggerations more ridiculous still.

"We must have gravy for our kitchens," Rousseau had said;\* "therefore it is that so many sick persons are in want of broth. We must have *liqueurs* on our tables; therefore it is that so many of our peasantry drink nothing but water. We must have hair-powder for our wigs; therefore it is that so many poor people are in want of bread."

Here there are as many mistakes as there are words. Every manufactured article acquires double, triple, tenfold, a hundred-fold its original value, and often even beyond that; it procures accordingly for the artisan double, triple, tenfold, a

\* Letter to M. Bordes.

hundred-fold more profit than if it had been given to him as a present to be used in its natural state. With as much flax as would cost a few pence, it is said, lace may be made of the value of two hundred pounds. Must we say, then, that were there more ladies without lace there would be fewer poor without linen? That handful of flax would not have made a shirt, but, by becoming lace, it has fed several persons for a twelvemonth.

Thus is it with all the rest. Those gravies which moved Rousseau's indignation, procured a livelihood to the cook who prepared them, to the butcher who sold the meat, to the farmer who reared the cattle. Those *liqueurs* are worth thirty times the little wine or fruits from which they have been extracted, and their price has passed into a host of hands. That farinaceous matter expended in powdering wigs, was sacrificed to a very absurd fashion, but the wheat so lost did not the less procure for a certain number of the labouring class much more bread than they could have made out of the wheat itself.

It was said then, and it is still sometimes said, that it is absurd and cruel to wear jewels, diamonds, a single one of which would feed ten families for a whole year. But it is not the diamond itself that would feed these families; it is the money that would be got for it by selling it. Thus there would always need to be a purchaser; there must ever be some one subject to the reproach of wearing on his finger as much bread as would feed fifty of his brethren. If nobody chooses to incur the guilt of such cruelty, why, then the diamond becomes a mere pebble, equally useless to the poor and to the rich. You are scandalized, on the whole, at the sum that has been spent upon it; but has that sum been buried out of sight? Is it not distributed, in reality, among the twenty, thirty, fifty laborious hands through which that jewel shall



have passed before reaching the purchaser? And if this be true of a diamond, which has a high value the moment it is found, is it not still more true of objects which owe their entire value to the labour bestowed on them? The price of a fashionable carriage is divided among three hundred different trades. If it is pride that makes you buy that carriage, it is wrong; but the wrong lies in the pride, not in the purchase, which is rather a good and patriotic work. "A Roman law that would have said to Lucullus, Spend nothing, would have said to him in effect, Make yourself richer still, in order that your grandson may have it in his power to buy up the republic."\*

Be it observed, in fine, that all that pertains to luxury is relative, and that here, accordingly, absolute formulas, were it on no other account, are inapplicable. The thinking man who is most hostile to luxury and is most desirous to preach by example, still will ever be found to have in his clothing, in his furniture, in his daily habits, many things that are really luxuries, many refinements that are unknown to millions of his fellow-men. There is, in fact, a wider distance between these last and him, than between him and the grandees whom he censures. In these matters we know of but one philosopher who was consistent—Diogenes. And it was a long time before even he discovered that his basin was too large.

We can so much the less forgive, accordingly, the economists of the last century for their declamations on this subject, as they had not, like their predecessors the preachers, the excuse of religious feeling. All well to speak of the moral dangers of luxury; all well, too, for certain excesses of it to be denounced or ridiculed; but to attack it generally, on the ground of its economical and social bearings, betrays an ignorance of the first elements of the science.

\* Voltaire—*Republican Ideas*.

V.—It betrayed a farther ignorance of those elements, to promise for ameliorations of detail, a universal influence on the wellbeing and happiness of the people.

The field of economical science—considerably restricted since it has been better worked—was then immense; witness in the *Encyclopédie* the article *Political Economy*, written by Rousseau. It seemed to be thought that it gave evidence at once of humane sentiments and enlarged views, to bring everything under the too long forgotten questions of production, labour, and the lot of the working classes—fatal error, which has again become that of our own days, and which would be less mischievous if they who do not share in it, would have the courage to say so! No, the workmen are not everything. That they have a right to special solicitude, this may be; but that states are made by them, and subsist for them, this is what society cannot admit without perishing. Amid all their strayings into error, the economists of the last century were more reasonable than certain thinkers of the present day; for they did not forget country labourers in their concern for those of the town, and millions of men for the sake of some hundred thousands. The Abbé de Besplas was a blockhead with his *Saint agriculture*; but with their *Saint industry*, the declaimers of our day are something worse than blockheads.

The men of that period, nevertheless, led the way to all the animosities that have conducted us to where we are. By exhibiting public felicity as attached to slight and easy reforms—which, however, were not effected—they taught the people habitually to suppose that there was a fixed determination on the part of the more fortunate persons of the age, to keep them in a state of poverty and suffering. Acts of injustice, and abuses, unhappily all too real, gave to their discourses an authority which otherwise they would not have

had. They became warmer and warmer in their exaggerations; they came at last to indulge in those *hymns* which were laughed at even in 1770, but which, twenty years afterwards, passed into death-yells.

The new science had promised, first of all, happiness. At the present day, after a hundred years of toil, when it would keep to positive facts and possible means, hardly does it venture to promise a slight alleviation of the old evils. Systems at that time either were lost in the clouds, or, in coming down to the earth, became quite unimportant. The same thing happens in our days to those who are foolhardy enough, or blinded enough, to promise aught beyond the reasonable and the possible. Either their declamations are altogether senseless, or, unless they make a candid confession of communism, they have nothing to disclose in the way of plans but what is utterly contemptible. One will propose, as a sovereign palliative, the creation of a new bank; another, an attempt at *phalanstère*;\* another, an emigration to America. No medium betwixt a general subversion and their small recipes. The mountain in labour brings forth either an earthquake or the classical mouse.

The truth is, it is not enough that we love the people, we must also know how to love them! Some allow themselves to run too fast into the belief, that in compassionating the woes of others, they have, in virtue of that alone, all that is required for guiding and instructing them. Shall we hold, then, that the preceptor has only to love his pupils, the father only to love his children? Let us distrust that love which,

\* From the Greek *φάλαγγξ* and *σπίρας*, the system by which Charles Fourier, like our Owen, proposed to cure all social evils by re-organizing society into so many *phalansteries*, containing each from five hundred to two thousand persons, to live in one spacious building, cultivating a common domain. See *Imperial Dictionary*, Art. "Phalansterianism."—*Trans.*

even when sincere, may be nothing but weakness; let us distrust it, especially, if, as all late revolutions have superabundantly proved, it is too often nothing but a mask. Let us distrust it even in ourselves; for it may happen, that when we think we are loving the people, we really do no more than love and worship in them the source of fortune and of power.

## CHAPTER XXV.

- I.—Impotency of Philosophy—Confessions of Rousseau and Voltaire—How Rousseau preached those instances of progress of which he has got the credit—He merely turned into sophisms what was generally taught—Doating amplifications.—II.—No effort made to keep to the true—His strong sayings on the subject of medicine and physicians—False sentiment worse than falsehood.
- III.—*Emile*—Principal sources of objections—Comedy and miracles; to reach what?—The author, his manners and his life—The sentiment of virtue without that of duty—The beginning of the *Confessions*—Faith without works.
- IV.—Rousseau a materialist in morals—Proofs—God and Immortality, crutches.
- V.—What, in Rousseau, the love of mankind becomes—The savage state made the starting-point, the ideal—The *Emile*, a code of selfishness—Ever the man under the ideas.

THE same involuntary quackery reoccurred in estimating moral results. There, too, miracles were promised. The world was to be not only happier, it was to be better; and philosophy was to do what religion had left undone.

Not that philosophy did not sometimes confess its impotence. Even Rousseau, who apparently had most faith in it, seemed to feel least ashamed, on occasions, to say that he hardly had any faith in it.\* “In the way of principles, philosophy can do nothing good that religion cannot do better still, and religion does much that philosophy is incapable of doing.” It is he, further, who has said:† “It is easy to make a display of fine maxims in books; but the question is, whether they hold well to the doctrine, whether they ne-

\* *Emile*, Book iv.

† *Ibid.*

cessarily flow from it—and this is what has not yet appeared. It remains, further, to know whether philosophy, at its ease and on its throne, could have a sufficient command over vanity, interest, ambition, man's petty passions; and whether it would practise that soft and gentle humanity which it vaunts to us with pen in hand." One would say that he had a vision here of Robespierre quoting Rousseau's *Emile*, and cutting off heads. "One of the sophisms with which the philosophist party is most familiar," he added, "is the contrasting of a people supposed to be composed of true philosophers with a people consisting of bad Christians; as if it were easier to make a people of true philosophers than it would be to make a people of true Christians! I know not that amongst individuals the one is more easily to be found than the other; but I know well, that from the moment that we have to do with peoples, we must assume that there will be some who will abuse philosophy without religion, as ours abuse religion without philosophy."

Of this same impotence even Voltaire would willingly speak; but this he did in ridiculing the Heraclituses who thought themselves obliged to groan over it. He himself was more than anything a Democritus—a grinning physician, who made a jest of the maladies he could not cure. The King of Prussia, accordingly, wrote to him one day:\* "What we want is a doctor to cure the fever, and not to satirize it. If you have any remedies, give them to us. If you have none, then pity our woes."

Yet Voltaire was perhaps more compassionate, even when he laughed, than others were with their grand phrases. There are people who imagine that they are at quits with you, because they have lamented your distresses; there are some, too, who never lament, but who act. Voltaire did not give him-

\* July 1774.

self out as the possessor of infallible secrets. He made little account of the people. They were "a compound of bears and monkeys;" and "the most worthless (*canaille*)" were in it "in the proportion of a hundred to one." But even this *canaille* he could lament over and succour upon occasions; indeed he befriended it more, at bottom, than many of the philanthropists of the time—more perhaps than even Rousseau.

Nobody, in fact, was more ready to believe than Rousseau, that he had discharged all he owed to the people in giving them some advices, even although he gave the lie to these in his own example. He had the pride of those physicians—still more obdurate than the sarcastic ones—who allow no doubt to be entertained as to the efficaciousness of their remedies, and who seem to say to you—well for you indeed if they do not plainly say to you: "Take this, or die." Nothing wiser—and certainly he has been lauded enough for it—than to prevail on mothers to nurse their own children; but see with what complacency he describes the effects of the reform which we find him to have urged on that point. "Let mothers deign to nurse their own children," he says.\* "Morals will then be reformed of themselves, natural feelings will re-awake in all hearts. The State will be re-peopled. This first point, this point alone, will comprise all." Did he believe this? Could he have seriously figured to himself that the State was to be re-peopled because high-born dames were to nurse their own children? No. He was infatuated himself, and he infatuated others. The age was thus constituted. Reason itself had to put on the livery of false sentiment if she would be heard. Those counsels of Rousseau on infant education might have been read, before the *Emile* appeared, in the *Treatise on the Corporeal Education of Children*, by Desessarts, and in the *Dissertation on the Physical*

\* *Emile*, Book I.

*Education of Children*, by Ballexserd; and these two authors had merely developed as physicians the ideas previously promulgated, for the most part, by Buffon. Rousseau had only to take them up. "His precepts are good," says Bachaumont's Journal; "but they are all drawn from the propositions that have been maintained by the faculty for many years." "We have said all that," said Buffon himself; "but M. Rousseau orders it, and he is obeyed." Why did people obey him rather than skilful physicians—rather than Buffon himself? How is it that he still passes for the first to have given those counsels which were current throughout Europe before him? He had done no more, as we have said, than give to truth the tone of falsehood. Could there then have been a necessity for this? And if there was a necessity for it in the eighteenth century, are we to be condemned to submit to it in absolving now those who made themselves the slaves of it then?

But for Rousseau there was no hardship in that necessity. What exaggerations too, on that same subject, with respect to the inconveniences attending the habits which he wished to uproot! One would say that he was never quite at his ease in keeping to the simple truth, and that he felt a longing to hasten away from it. After having, for example, energetically denounced those ladies who refused to submit to the discomforts of maternity, we see him plunge, like a distracted person, into the abyss of misery which, he would have it believed, they are hollowing out under foot for the human race. "This fact," he says, "added to other causes of depopulation, announces the approaching fate of Europe. The sciences, the arts, the philosophy, and the manners which it engenders, will ere long turn it into a desert. It will become peopled with wild beasts; it will have made no great change of inhabitants." In truth, if one would continue to



give him credit for the good things he has said on these subjects, one must not come too fresh from the reading of the strange displays of strong feeling with which he has seasoned them. It was once said of a wit who had the misfortune to exhaust his jests: "When he says a good thing, he never has done with it until he has made it intolerable." Rousseau, when he gets hold of a truth, never lets it alone until he has made it a paradox, or something worse.

II.—It would be difficult, accordingly, to find in his works a single idea, a single advice, a single observation, in which he knew how to stop at the proper place, and in which his most fervent disciples have not something to retrench. How many times has not he himself admitted, in his *Confessions*, in his letters, this irresistible tendency to embrace with the imagination what reason alone ought to be called upon to judge. How many ideas, how many counsels, in which one feels that he has not even attempted to remain within the bounds of the possible and the useful, and has sought only to compose, at any cost, a piece of fine writing! He will not have it that men should eat animal food, because he wants to translate a very eloquent passage from Plutarch, where that author portrays the carnivorous race in the cruellest aspect. He forgets that he himself has demonstrated, in his *Discourse on Inequality*, that man, by his physical construction, is a carnivorous animal.\* Did he really forget? Possibly; but he would not have forgotten had not his sophistical instinct suggested what he would gain by his forgetfulness. The history of this page is that of a hundred others.

We have compared him with some physicians. Was it from a sort of professional jealousy that he said so much in reprobation of medicine? There, too, we might find singular

\* Bachaumont—June 1762.

instances of the incapacity under which he seemed to lie of remaining true. Physicians! All that Molière ever said of them in jest, Rousseau set himself to repeat with the utmost gravity and with profound indignation. And yet medicine had undergone a material change. It was now practised with talent, and conscientiously; there had ceased to be any quacks but those moral physicians, the men who professed to prescribe for the human race. What of that? "I shall ever ask," says he, "what real good this art has ever done to mankind. Some, no doubt, of those whom it cures, would have died; but millions whom it kills, would have lived." Elsewhere he says: "For one sick person whom the physician cures, he kills a hundred. Medicine may be useful to some men, but it is fatal to the human race. It is a lying art, which heals us less of our maladies than it frightens us with them. Would you see men of true courage? Look for them in places where there are no physicians." Was this somewhat of a hit at Voltaire, who made them of so much consequence, and who even fixed his residence at the *Délices* in order, as he said, to be near Tronchin, and then invited all Europe to come and be cured by the Genevese physician? "You must come to see me; come and eat trouts from my lake; and if troubled with indigestion, Tronchin is at hand to make you well again." But Rousseau, on the contrary, exclaims: "Never shall I send for a physician to my *Emile*, at least unless his life is in imminent danger, for then the worst that he can do is to kill him."

Rousseau, it is said, afterwards regretted these sarcasms. "Had I published a new edition of my works," he said to a writer from whom we had the fact,\* "I would soften down what I have written on physicians." But had he once set himself in right earnest to soften down all that required it,

\* Bernardine de Saint-Pierre—*Préambule de l'Arcadie*.

where could he have stopped? In the meantime, it was to strong expressions of this kind, more than to his eloquences, that his theories were indebted for their success. A worn-out age will have nothing but paradoxical lessons, as a palled palate will have only stimulating food, but which also vitiates it more and more. By his success in habituating that age to disrelish genuine sentiment, Rousseau did more than any one to promote the universal depravation against which he declaimed. Voltaire perverted men's understandings, Rousseau perverted their hearts. The perverted understanding may be put to rights; and what is there, in fact, now remaining of the falsehoods of Voltaire? But as for Rousseau's sophisms, we shall have them for a long while yet. Falsehood is but a leprosy—one may be cured of it; but false sentiment is a disease that affects the innermost folds of the soul, and attacks the very sources of life.

III.—Shall we proceed to repeat the innumerable objections to which this same *Emile* has given rise? Let us merely indicate the principal points of view from which it has been attacked.

Here we have a child who proceeds in some sort to do over again by himself the whole work of civilisation. "He invents," says one critic,\* "all that he ought to learn, from the sciences to the virtues." This is the first source of objections. Where did the child get this? Where has he seen it? Where could he hope to find it? Had the author's sole object been to show that children should be habituated to reflection, that they may be led to find out many things of themselves, some advices and some counsels might have sufficed; if he believed in the possibility of that long series of miracles, he has proved

\* M. de Barante.

by that alone that he did not know children, that he had never made any attempts to know them.

To what are these miracles attached? To an ingenious but fabulous scenic exhibition, in which all the most fortunate incidents that might be supposed to have happened in the lives of twenty children, perhaps of a hundred children, are made to co-operate towards forming the mind of one child.—Second source of objections. The improbabilities of the picture would of themselves prove the impossibility of the substance.

So much for intellectual education. Morally, Emile is brought up not *for* society but *against* it. He is made after the image of his master, and his master is Rousseau. Then, supposing that his education is successful, Emile will turn out a Rousseau.—Third source of objections. Was Rousseau so virtuous, or, at least, whether virtuous or not, was he so happy, that one can approve of a system the success of which would result in making men like him? Take from him the lustre of his talents, see him without his glory, and could you find a single man who would like to condemn his son to live as he lived, to die as he died?

Let us take no unfair advantage of his lamentable confessions. But pity cannot be oblivion; and, in spite of ourselves, the life of a moralist is, in our eyes, the first commentary on his works.

"He wished," says that same critic, "to make man advance to virtue, not by his respect for the obligations of duty, but by a free and passionate impulse of his own."

Well then, this enfranchisement which he offered, nay which he imposed on others, he had begun by according to himself. The sentiment of virtue he had; that of duty he had not. Hence all his failings, all his misfortunes; hence also the right we concede to ourselves of judging his system by his life, seeing his life was its result. Of what conse-

quence to us, viewed in this light, the confession of his faults and the misery which they brought upon him? Some would have us throw a veil over his errors. Wherefore? Are these personal offences which we are bound, as good Christians, never more to recollect, the moment the offender has acknowledged them? No! The man we willingly leave out of view; but when we have to do with the moralist, it is not our fault if the man is always there to confirm all the bad things he has said, and to belie all the good.

The sentiment of virtue unaccompanied with that of duty, is only, as Rousseau has proved by his whole life, a source of pride and self-satisfaction.

Read the opening of the *Confessions*. "Let the trumpet of the last judgment sound when it will; I will come, and with this book in my hand, present myself before the sovereign Judge. I will say aloud: 'Here is what I have done, what I have said, what I was. . . . Eternal Being! gather around me the numberless multitude of my fellows. Let them listen to my confessions, let them groan over my unworthiness, let them blush at my wretchedness. Let each of them in turn uncover his heart with like sincerity at the footstool of Thy throne, and then let any one of them say, if he dare—'I was better than that man.'"

Read, dated 1762, these words of a letter to Malesherbes: "I shall die full of hope in the supreme God, and fully persuaded, that of all the men I have known in the course of my life, not one was better than myself."

These follies have their serious side. The system of which they are the expression, is but too much in accordance with our tardiness in duty, with our desire to be virtuous at little cost. But for this, they could not have failed to cover with ridicule the man who could have allowed himself to indulge them.

Evidently, he had taken the sentiment of virtue for virtue itself; he has elevated to the rank of something meritorious what, in itself, is nothing but a vague instinct, which may proceed from the imagination alone. The more strongly a man is endowed with that instinct, the more, in all justice, is he to be blamed if he does not obey it. But Rousseau, on the contrary, makes it a sort of excuse for all his vices; and though he may not expressly say it, it is evident enough when we hear him call himself virtuous at the very moment that he is about to relate some of his follies. St. Paul was much more in the right—not only as a Christian, but also as a philosopher—when he spoke of two men in him, and when, far from excusing the bad man in him by pleading the good instincts of the other, he trembled to think of the responsibility which resulted from them to his soul.

The sentiment of virtue without that of duty is faith without works; and, in human morals as well as in religion, “faith without works is dead.” With the feeling that there is a God, yet without any precise feeling of our obligations with regard to Him, one may commit great crimes; with the sentiment of virtue, one may be nothing less than virtuous. Say, if you please, that this is not logical; say that the sentiment of virtue ought to be sufficient in morals, and the feeling that there is a God in religion. That *ought* to be so, true; but it is not so. And seeing that it is not so, every philosopher who reasons as if it were so, reasons amiss.

IV.—From this we may see why the morality of Rousseau, based to appearance on a lofty spiritualism, was so little superior, in point of fact, to that of the undisguised materialists of his time.

Can we say even that it was superior to it? Let us forget, if we can, how far Rousseau was, in many respects, from

being so good as Helvetius, as Diderot, as Voltaire; let us not travel beyond his written doctrines, and even in these, under that varnish of spirituality, materialism is at the base.

It is there, in the excessive importance given to the things of the body—to the development of the material man;

It is there, in that obstinate tendency to bring all things back to the indications and to the laws of physical nature;

It is there, in the complacency with which, even in preaching virtue, he enters into details which no one could better have chosen with the intention of preaching vice;

It is there, in fine—and this should of itself suffice—in that constant affectation he shows of placing on this earth the final aim of all the labours, and of all the progressive steps of man. Rousseau does not say in set terms that there is nothing beyond this world; but were he to say it, what would there be to change in his system? The question once stated as he states it, of what importance is a belief in God and faith in the soul's immortality? These cease to be anything more than vain accessories, than steps in the progress of that civilisation which he blames, which he deplures; they are but so many of those crutches which the human race has made for itself on growing old, but which it could perfectly dispense with in its youth; and certain it is, in fact, that if the condition of the brutes has ever been our normal condition, we should hardly in those times have thought of God or the soul. We shall not find Rousseau saying that we are wrong to believe in God; but he speaks of Him, in some sort, as if he wanted to teach us to dispense with Him. He would have us place our glory in being good without Him—wise without Him. A deist in metaphysics, he is an atheist in morals; and if he does not say, like Saint Lambert, that "everything will go ill on in the world as long as people seek above for what ought to be done here below," his boiling morality is nothing

more at bottom than the icy *Catechism* of the author of the *Saisons*. "Rousseau's warmth seems to me," said D'Alembert,\* "to be more of the senses than of the soul;" and D'Alembert was himself a materialist.

V.—Much more than this, Rousseau equally proscribes that love of men which has always best supplied, although imperfectly, what is wanting in thoughts of God and immortality.

He proscribes it, we say, and that in the worst possible manner—the same as that in which he had already proscribed God—that is, by appearing to inculcate it. He does not say, "Hate your fellow-men;" and would to God he had, for in that case nobody would have been deceived. We should not have seen his disciples causing blood to flow in torrents while calling themselves, and even believing themselves, the friends of the human race. But without saying as much, see by how many ways he leads men to it.

His ideal perfection, first of all, his starting-point, is that famous savage state, such as is never found in the most frightful wildernesses. It is that of man without even the sociability of the brute; it is a freedom such as terrifies, an isolation which it freezes one to think of.

Such is the model he proposes. All that has removed you, or will remove you, from that state, he calls servile degradation; all that brings you nearer to it, he calls freedom, virtue.

What are we to see in this? A jest?—then Rousseau has been laughing at us. A real system?—then it is not enough that we only break down statues, as the shade of Fabricius would have us do; we must demolish houses, and go back to the woods: but, let it not be forgotten, each by himself alone—for with the family there still would be society, slavery.

Let us set aside, if you please, these monstrous consequences

\* *Jugement sur Emile*—(Judgment on *Emile*).



which Rousseau has not ventured to announce. Let us keep to his positive counsels, to what he himself gives us as the practical side of his ideas.

Well then, avowed materialists have never composed a work in which selfish interest was more positively inculcated than in *Emile*. What are other men in the eyes of Rousseau's pupil? Indifferent or hostile; but chiefly hostile. He is taught not only to have no need of them, which is sometimes very good and sometimes also very sad, but, further, he is taught to be of no use to them as long as they remain unconverted to the same principles, that is indefinitely. He is deceived in being left to believe that he has come of himself to know so many things, when, on the contrary, he required to have so many influences set in operation in order to teach them to him; he is habituated to disdain the lessons and the commerce of men. He will not go to live in the woods, and he is perhaps less capable of doing so than another would, so factitious had been everything with which he had been hitherto surrounded; but he was to make, in the midst of other men, a world for himself, encompassed with a thick rampart of disdain and selfishness.

Alas! We shall be told that what we are describing is not *Emile*, but Rousseau. Is that our fault? It is in vain for us to attempt examining the doctrinal part only. The author is ever before us; we are ever compelled to return to our first question: Was Rousseau so very virtuous, and so very happy, that one should ever be tempted to be so after his manner? In his ideal scheme of rural felicity: "Each," says he, "avowedly preferring himself to every other, would think it right that every other should prefer himself to him." This is selfishness logically maintained—selfishness on system, and emancipated from all shame. The whole of *Emile* is concentrated in that sentence.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

- I.—Had Rousseau any faith in his own teachings?—He amuses himself with showing their uselessness—Would he have charged himself with the task of applying them?
- II.—The same impotence in point of politics—The Corsicans—The Poles—Strange counsels.
- III.—Despotism, the ultimate conclusion of equality thus understood—Two different bases for the sovereignty of the people—With Rousseau, sovereignty is omnipotence—Facts have proved this.
- IV.—It is the same with Montesquieu—What is meant by *the people* when personified—Its *salvation* becomes the supreme law—What that saying may involve, and what it has often involved—Montesquieu justifying ostracism and a State Inquisition.
- V.—An enraged sheep—What was wanting in the men of that time in order to their knowing what a people and what a revolution is—How much better we know than they did.—VI.—Voltaire alone was on this point sometimes better sighted—Montesquieu's strange mistakes—The people admirable in its choice—Cabal not dangerous.
- VII.—Rome and Greece flourished only while democracy was bridled—No great citizens were ever of the democratical party—Democracy is good only where it is real; it is real only where it is temperate.

HAD Rousseau any faith, at least, in his own teachings?

When we learn that he laboured at a kind of romance which was to form a sequel to the *Emile*, one might have supposed that he was about to gratify himself by showing in his old pupil, now become a hero, the infallible results of so long and so powerful an education.

Well then, in this romance, Emile is an ordinary man.

He suffers and he weeps like any other mortal. But for his name, and Rousseau's telling his history, who would imagine that we had here the old object of so many cares, and the subject of so many eloquent pages? He remains virtuous, to be sure, at least after the fashion of Rousseau; but Sophie, his Sophie, educated like him, and selected by the preceptor himself as the purest specimen of what education can do among women—see even her corrupted and criminal. Shall it be said that even the best brought up pupil may turn out ill? Had Rousseau really directed the education of that young woman, there would have been candour in the admission that not the less was she lost; but to admit this without any obligation to do so, to imagine it at pleasure in a romance, is to make a mockery both of his system and of those who shall have had the simplicity to believe in it; it is like saying to them: "It is idle for you to join with me in crying, *Virtue! Virtue!* Whether you may have been brought up according to my method or according to any other, not the less are you radically vicious. Go to. . . Don't torment yourselves about it. I am vicious, I too, and not the less do I deem myself the best of men." What, besides, was virtue in the eye of the man who could write a book of which he himself said that the woman who should open it was a lost woman? \* This, if you will, may have been only a strong saying; but in such strong sayings we find the best picture of the man. What right has a man to preach virtue who makes a profession of not believing in it? "Women of Paris and of London," he said, "no abode excludes miracles, but, for me, I do not know of any; and if a single one among you has a heart really honest, I understand nothing about our institutions." Thus, where Boileau had said in jest: "There are as many as three," it is with the utmost seriousness that he would fain

\* Preface to the *Nouvelle Héloïse*.

see none. Mark that, shortly before confounding Paris with London, he said that Protestant countries offer, in general, "more domestic attachments, worthier wives, and more tender mothers." Here we have virtuous wives and tender mothers, not one of whom has an honest soul!

One question more. Does any one believe that his confidence in his system went so far as that he should have wished to make a trial of it?

The young Dupin, his old pupil, had gone all wrong. It is true that this was before the appearance of the *Emile*, and that he had not been allowed to bring him up entirely according to his own fancy. But, after the publication of his book, several children were sent to him, with a promise not to thwart him in any way. He refused. On his passage through Strasbourg, an honest Genevese brought him his son, brought up, as he told him, according to the precepts of the *Emile*. "So much the worse," replied he, "so much the worse for both your son and yourself."

II.—We find him also in politics to have been influenced by the same timid and impotent sentiments.

In the *Contrat Social*\* he had eulogized the Corsicans, desiring, he said, that "some wise man would teach them to preserve their liberty."

In 1764, the Corsicans thought they had found this wise man. They besought Rousseau to become their Lycurgus and their Solon.

Rousseau refused, but with a visible embarrassment.† He evidently felt that he must either throw his theories aside, or draw up a constitution which itself would be but an impracticable theory.

Would Montesquieu have accepted the task, or, if he had

\* Book ii.

† Letters to M. Buttafuoco.

accepted it, would he have had any better success? This is doubted, and not unreasonably.

Mably, when consulted by the Poles, replied only by offering them some insignificant counsels.

Rousseau, whom they also consulted, was unable even to give them insignificant ones. We find him strengthening, by the absurdity of the remedies which he suggests,\* the opinion that the malady was incurable; we find him hastening the dismemberment of the country, for he contributed to remove all scruples from the minds of the sovereigns who wanted to share it amongst them. While anarchy was the grand source of all the calamities of Poland, he had but one engrossing apprehension; and that was, that a central administration might be formed capable of oppressing the sovereign, that is to say, the people. He speaks almost as if he thought that Poland, from its very anarchy, was nearer truth and happiness than all Europe besides. He does not repel the idea of a monarchy, but he would have an elective monarchy, which is the worst of all; he prefers an elective king, even though absolute, to a hereditary king with limited powers. In fine, to the objection he foresees will be drawn from the troubles which will infallibly accompany each election, he replies by offering the oddest of counsels. Let them draw lots! There, too, we find the famous paragraph, suppressed or contested by some complacent editors, but perfectly authentic,† in which he recommends the Poles to “decapitate” their king. He adds, it is true, that it would be more humane not to do so; but to appeal, in such a question, only to humanity is to give every encouragement to acts of violence, seeing there will always be people ready to say that the death of a single man is a small matter compared with the public safety. It is not

\* *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de la Pologne*—(Considerations on the Government of Poland).

† It has been restored in the later editions.

quite certain, it will be seen, that we may not have done Rousseau too much honour in supposing that he would have condemned all the excesses of the Revolution.

Thus, after having travelled back in theory as far as the imagination could go, he reached at one stroke what are practically its last consequences. Let Poland be lost in the abyss of anarchy rather than tolerate the smallest attempt on the rights of the sovereign, who is everybody. The sovereignty exists no longer, if it remain not entirely and absolutely either in the hands of the natural sovereign—the people, or in the hands of him to whom the people shall have delegated it.

III.—Then—and here we have the grand, the eternal objection against Rousseau's system—the ultimate result of equality, according to his meaning of it, is despotism.

Nobody in our days, not even the avowed partisans of what is called the divine right, denies at bottom the sovereignty of the people; but as there never was a word more abused, so there is not one which we ought more perseveringly to endeavour to restore to its true meaning.

Let us ever begin, then, with asking where this sovereignty of the people is understood to reside, and from whence it is made to come.

If you acknowledge it to be founded on the equality of all men in the sight of God, on the social instincts with which all men have been endowed by God, on the impossibility of assigning any other logical foundation to political and civil laws, then it is not only a reasonable principle, but it is a fact—a fact as positive and as clear as any fact that there is in history, in philosophy, in morals.

But if, with Rousseau, you found it on a contract, on a convention concluded between beings who owed nothing to each other, who might have dispensed with each other, who were

essentially isolated and free, then farewell to liberty. The people are no more sovereign, they are omnipotent. It is no longer laws that they make, but principles; good is good, and evil evil, only according to their decisions. Every one is deemed to have submitted to all that the plurality shall ordain, not only in matters that can be regulated only by the plurality, but always and in everything. The individual ceases to exist. The government, wherever placed, collective or in a single chief, is absolute.

Here we have what has been superabundantly proved by facts. Wherever the people have been sovereign after the manner of Rousseau, they have been omnipotent; wherever a government has been established according to the principles of Rousseau, that government has had no limits. "Had I a province that I wished to punish," said the King of Prussia, "I would call for the philosophers and would give them that province to govern." Despot as he was, he saw a despotism about to come which would be much severer than his. I paused, he seems to say, before the reclamations of a miller; but before whom will the people stirred into revolt by them—before whom will they pause? "My miller said, We have judges at Berlin; but when these philosophers reign, who will any longer put faith in justice?"

He was not mistaken. Louis XIV., during seventy years of his reign, did less in an arbitrary way than the French Convention did in a few months; he was very far from ever having exercised, in the plenitude of his glory, the rights arrogated to himself by a simple representative of the people. Has not France had recently to submit, if we except massacres, to as much and perhaps more than in 1793? Despotism, at that last epoch, came in at least gradually; in 1848, it did not take four days for the country to find itself inundated with men whose power had no limits. Throughout

all Europe the late revolutions have resulted in the dictatorship of chiefs. Let socialism come, the compulsory complement of all these revolutions if not arrested in their course, and it is not only political liberty that will disappear, or even civil liberty—it is individuality that will be destroyed ; it is man himself who, in so far as he is a moral, distinct, and free being, will be no more.

IV.—Liberty, then, with Rousseau, is despotism. Is it anything else with Montesquieu ?

No. What the one prepares for the future, the other approves by implication in the past. If he raises barriers against the encroachments of kings, he demolishes those which the popular wave must find to check its course, if it would not swallow up itself after having swallowed up everything else.

Like Rousseau, he departs at once from truth, by personifying the people, and making them think, and will, and act, as if they were one single and real being.

This, we say, is to place himself outside the limits of truth, for it is to make no account of the diversities of view that will ever be found to exist in the midst of a people ; it is to give to that which is never more than the opinion of the majority all the rights of a unanimous will. Shall we be told that this is what takes place with respect to every kind of law ? In practice, indeed, it must be so ; but when, by this personification of the people, you erect the fact into a right, when you attribute to *the people*, as a single being, the decisions of a part of the people, you acknowledge in them, by that alone, all the power which an individual possesses over himself ; the people, then, can no longer be unjust, which is equivalent to saying that justice exists only for them. You make the people a man, but an irresponsible man ; they have rights, they have no duties.



This is what we have seen, point by point, in all revolutions. A majority brought together, by what means it matters not, is *the people*; a minority happening—how, it matters not—to prevail, is *the people*; any assemblage of persons professing some ideas rather than others, is *the people*, always *the people*. Now, no sooner does this come to be the meaning of what is called the people, than it infallibly happens that rights, more extensive than those of a majority regularly constituted and regularly consulted, are assigned to them. They can do anything; and let them do what they like, they do well.

It is thus that Montesquieu, seduced by a false definition, or, if you will, by the want of a correct definition, comes to emancipate *the people* from all the moral laws from which he could not have entertained a thought of emancipating the individual.

“The salvation of the people,” we find him say,\* “is the supreme law.”

No; the supreme law is justice. A man who should hesitate to sacrifice his property and his life rather than fail to satisfy his moral obligations,† you would condemn; but as for a people, you will tell them that it is their supreme law, that it is their salvation!

And would you know to what the author immediately applies, in that passage, this deplorable maxim? He shows that two contradictory laws, the latter of which abrogates the former, are not really contradictory, inasmuch as one and the same principle—the salvation of the people—has produced both.

Here there is an opening made for the scandalous changes

\* *Spirit of Laws*, Book xxvi. chap. 23.

† *Plutôt que de forfaire à l'honneur*.—I would have translated it *honour* but that a false idea of honour is so often the misleading motive of erring and despotic majorities. Justice is too often thought concession, and concession dishonourable.—*Trans.*

of policy that follow revolutions, when the men who have made them, begin to wish for quite the contrary of what they had wished for before, or to do identically what they had blamed their predecessors for doing. They invoked the salvation of the people; they invoke it still;—this is enough to prevent the blinded mob from accusing them of having changed, enough to make that mob associate itself with their most odious breaches of morality.\* There is not a folly, not a crime, that has not sheltered itself beneath this phrase. Even were it, moreover, never to be appealed to but with pure intentions, still it would be immoral to give it so wide a bearing, since it is always in reality tantamount to saying that the end justifies the means.

We have already seen, in speaking of war and of conquests, what a frightful latitude Montesquieu gave, with respect to a people's external relations, to the right of conservation and preservation. Every people is constituted judge in the last resort of what its salvation shall call upon it to undertake against its neighbours; every chief of the people—for it is never the multitude that, in point of fact, decides those matters—is freed from the scruples that might check his ambition. Montesquieu does no more than put into system, after the manner of conquerors, what they have but too well contrived, at all times, to discover for themselves; for never was an unjust war undertaken without the public salvation being openly pleaded as its excuse.

In a nation's home policy we see the same emancipation from the laws of common morality. In ostracism, which all historians have united in regarding as the cope-stone of popular omnipotence, Montesquieu sees nothing but what is quite simple and excellent. "Ostracism ought to be examined," he says,† "by the rules of political law, and not by those of

\* *de foi*;—lit. of faith.

† *Spirit of Laws*, Book xxvi. chap. 17.

civil law." Here we have at once what is tantamount to the recognition of two moralities, and to the erecting into theory what the most perverse have never professed except in practice. "Far from this usage," he goes on to say, "being capable of giving an odious character to popular government, it is, on the contrary, very well fitted to prove its gentleness." Thus, what have you to say, Aristides? This good people might have imprisoned you, slain you, for you struck at their liberty by obliging them to call you "the just;" but they are content with banishing you. Was not this "an admirable law which prevented the ill effects that the glory of a citizen might have produced, by crowning him with fresh glory?" For this is what Montesquieu farther adds.

To these odious sophisms we have but one word of reply. What would any one say, what would Montesquieu himself have said, of a sovereign who should exile one of his subjects to prevent his hearing him any longer called "the just"? Well then, that which would be thought monstrous in a despot he considers as *admirable* in a people. With his inexorable deductions, he proceeds to legitimize even a State inquisition, the most crushing of all despotisms. After showing that the dictatorship at Rome could only be temporary, he adds that, "At Venice, on the contrary,\* a permanent magistracy is required. . . . There an occult magistracy is requisite, because the crimes that it has to punish, always deeply laid, are planned in secrecy and in silence. This magistracy behoves to have a general inquisition, for it has not only to arrest the evils that it knows, but to prevent even those that it knows not." You will see that he does not utter a word of blame or of regret. He accepts the horrible Council of Ten as he would accept of a court of correctional police; and there, too, what he would deem infernal coming from a sovereign,

\* *Spirit of Laws*, Book II. chap. 3.

he thinks quite natural when it comes, or is thought to come, from the people.

V.—Such are the results to which men are led, even with genius and right feelings on their side, when people set themselves to study only in theory what ought properly to be studied in practice, what ought properly to be seen. When Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse called Condorcet "*un mouton enragé*" (an enraged sheep), did she not describe all those humane and gentle thinkers who considered themselves as in duty bound to have no bowels as soon as their principles came to be in question? Before them, some disciples of Descartes are said to have so fully persuaded themselves that animals have no feeling, that they unscrupulously inflicted on them the most frightful tortures. Might we not say that this is, in some sort, what has been repeated in politics? Pitiless theories have brought about pitiless acts. Those who passed for the apostles of modern liberty, a Montesquieu, a Mably, a Condorcet, a Rousseau, are found to have scattered the seeds of that despotism of which revolutions have presented us with the spectacle, and of the still more oppressive despotism with which we are threatened by other theorists born of them.

Men were ill situate in those times of profound peace and complete political inexperience, for forming a sound estimate of the nearer or remoter bearings of the popular passions and of revolutions. Rousseau, whom an ardent imagination would not even allow to ponder the lessons of the past, struck upon all the rocks of blind speculation; Montesquieu, who, one would think, could not have advanced a step without resting on history, often found her but a false guide, because he needed the aid of present times for the better elucidation of the past. In order to appreciate democracy, one must see it

in operation ; in order to judge of revolutions, one must have breathed their atmosphere. We have acquired during the last sixty years, and we are still acquiring, by merely looking around us, lights which meditation and intelligence could not have procured, even for genius, before lessons were supplied by facts. "The present has enabled us to comprehend many things which we never could have unravelled in the past. . . . How many governments, how many constitutions, have we not admired and regarded as models, which we must now look upon in another light ! How many men once appeared to us crowned with lustre and glory, whose merits and virtues have been destroyed or diminished after our having seen what circumstances may conduct to renown ! How many remote events seemed to us solemn and imposing, but which now appear idle comedies of which posterity has lost the secret,"\* or rather, we would willingly add, to too much of which it has been seen to return in contemporary events ! How many repetitions have we beheld of those miserable comedies of the Greeks and Romans ! How much have we not discovered of those old democratical mysteries, so sadly or so pleasantly explained at our expense by modern revolutions !

VI.—All this, a century ago, was a sealed book. Voltaire alone, launching his doubts in all directions, sometimes hit the mark, as, for example, when he said that instead of admiring the senate so much when it presented itself to Varro, and thanked him for not having despaired of the public safety, it would have been more correct to have simply said that those who had had the credit of elevating him, a man of no mark, to the consulship, had that of maintaining him there in spite of his demonstrated nullity. But it is difficult to suppress a

\* M. de Borante—*Littérature du Dix-huitième Siècle*—(Literature of the Eighteenth Century).

smile when we see with what manifest sincerity Rousseau, Mably, Montesquieu, and that whole school of cabinet historians, comment on the ancient revolutions, the dramas of the agora and the forum. There, too, we have *the people*, ever *the people*. They do not suspect, they will not suspect, what they would have been taught by four days of a life spent at Rome, at Athens, or in more than one country in the nineteenth century—to wit, that the people are never more really annihilated than when they seem to be everything, for it is always then that they are most led, and that they are farthest from having their own proper will, action, and life.

What forgetfulness of the past, what blindness to the future, for example, in such an assertion as the following: "The people are admirable in their choice of those whom they have to intrust with a part of their authority!"\* If this were an idea that still required any refutation, we should not speak of the instances of a bad choice made by the people in all times, and which of themselves say enough; we should go directly to the best of such instances, and we would say, What withheld the people, in the greater number of cases, from making a very different choice? Has merit often had the honour of being chosen without the aid of faction? Are there many instances in which the multitude have really made a good choice, that is to say, without having had it imposed upon them, like the bad, by circumstances, by leaders, by their passions being wrought upon? Would you call that man wise, would you think him *admirable* in his elections, who not only often makes a bad one, but who would never make a good one, except under the sway of impulses and excitations of that sort? Once more, if you would personify the people, judge them at least, after having done so, as you would judge a man. Don't give to the people the indulgence

\* *Spirit of Laws*, Book ii. ch. 2.

you would refuse to a simple citizen, and which you would think it ridiculous to accord to a king. Plato is far more severe when he portrays the fickleness, the levities, the follies of the mob. It is because he had himself seen them ; and, accordingly, he has better described the history of our times than those who wrote, hardly a century ago, on these same subjects. Why is it that this history has always been to be begun anew, and always so unprofitably for those who recommence it ?

What inexperience, too, and what an appeal to despotism in that which Montesquieu adds on popular votings ! “ When the people vote,” says he, “ it ought to be done openly ; and this ought to be regarded as a fundamental law of democracy.” Among the angels, perhaps ; among men secret voting, on the contrary, is one of the first conditions of liberty.\*

But what are we now inquiring about ? It is not about liberty that Montesquieu and Rousseau are so much interested. They lay down their principles, come afterwards what may ! “ Faction is dangerous in a senate ; it is dangerous in a body of nobles ; it is not dangerous in the people, whose nature it is to act passionately.”† What ! because a man shall be naturally passionate, there will be no danger in exciting his passions, no fraud in working upon them for a selfish object ? And what would be fraud with respect to one man, would not be fraud with respect to the people ? Our professed insurgents would not dare to say this as plainly as Montesquieu has done.

#### VII.—And it is to the decay of strength in democracy thus

\* This is surely said too absolutely. A public vote is a public trust, and ought to be exercised before the public eye. And if, as will often happen, some great principle is involved in a man's vote, secret voting deprives him of the means of testifying to the principles he holds. If he suffers by an open vote, that testimony becomes all the more effective.—*Trans.*

† *Spirit of Laws*, Book ii. ch. 2.

understood, that Rousseau does not hesitate to attribute the ruin of the free cities! What reply shall be made? Is it a point on which there is even any room for argument? Open the pages of history, and see if it was not, on the contrary, when democracy had limits imposed on it, that they were free within and powerful abroad? The glorious years of Athens were those in which the people were content to be reputed sovereign, but dreamt not of actually being so. Rome, for ages, was less than anything a democracy; and those were the very ages, nevertheless, from which Rousseau takes almost all his examples. Of Cincinnatus, Fabricius, Cato, all those great names that have become synonymous with patriotism and virtue, history does not show us one in the ranks of the democratic party. Ardent republicans, they were on that very account enemies of a state of things in which *Republic* is a mere word. With democracy, when it actually came, people fell under the domination of the low leaders instead of the high, under that of the irresponsible instead of that of men who could have nothing to conceal and wished to conceal nothing. People obeyed a Clodius rather than a Cato, while waiting for the time when they were to bow their heads under Cæsar—a great demagogue at his outset, or to submit to have them cut off by Caligula.

Thus, without attacking democracy in itself, without calling it, as Voltaire did, the government of the *canaille*,\* we say that in order to its being good, it must needs be real; now it is generally all the less real that it desires and believes itself to be more. Beyond a certain limit, the more you

\* "When I besought you to be the restorer of Greece, my thoughts did not run so far as to conjure you to re-establish democracy. I love not the government of the mob (*canaille*)."—Letter to the King of Prussia.

"You are quite right, my lord, in saying that the Genevese are scarcely wise; but it is because the people are beginning to be masters in this small republic."—Letter to the Duke de Richelieu, 1785.



enfranchise the multitude, the more you subjugate it. Its decrees, from being the work of a senate, of a caste, will become those of the first comer who is bold enough to seize the reins which that senate, that caste, shall have allowed to be snatched out of their hands. Absolute mistress of the government, the multitude will not only be surrounded with more men ready to do their utmost in order to have their share of power, but it will deliver that power over to them more readily than if itself possessed only a part of it, subject to certain forms, and exercised concurrently with the authority of another body. In a word, in a wisely-tempered democracy, the people count for much ; in a pure democracy, from the circumstance of their being everything, they are nothing. It is no longer they that think ; it is no longer they that will. If you would portray them, don't represent them as a strong man going straight forward to his aim ; represent them rather as an old man whom one heir is pulling this way, and another heir pulling that. Well, moreover, will it be, if, in order that the resemblance may be perfect, you may not come to have to represent them as no better than a drunkard !

## CHAPTER XXVII.

- I.—Universal suffrage—Three cases—Number of voters no guarantee—Sincerity difficult, liberty rare—Frauds.—II.—Fickleness—A people seldom know what they would like—Popular voting, a certificate of fragility—What laws are most respected—*Majestas populi*.
- III.—Moral inconveniences—The sovereignty of the people permanently established, is a weapon in the hands of the first comer—Extremes then meet—"Have I said anything very foolish?"—IV.—Parties ever on the alert—Ambitions sharpened—Interested or blind respect for the decisions of the mob.
- V.—Universal suffrage reposes on a fiction—Practical absurdities—Illusions become impossible—To enlighten and moralize, the only resource—To obey as a citizen, but still retaining freedom as a man.

ALL that we have said of democracy in general we would say of universal suffrage, its most ordinary form. Like democracy, it would be excellent could it be real; like democracy, it becomes an evil, because it is real almost never.

Let us imagine a hundred thousand citizens going to vote on a certain law, or to proceed to any election whatsoever.

Three cases may present themselves: either the voters will be unanimous; or a minority will appear, though a feeble one; or the struggle will prove keen, and the majority will carry the day by but a few votes.

Unanimity may equally prove much or nothing; for it may equally result from a serious conviction or from a blind passion, from true freedom or from an odious pressure. Which of the two is the more frequent in history? Which laws have been most generally voted without opposition by the crowd—

the good or the bad? Which men have oftenest had the totality of the voices given—the honourable or the vile, liberty's true friends, or those who were about to become tyrants under her name?

Thus a minority may be all the more significant from its being small; for its very exiguity will prove, in certain cases, that it is composed of those who think, who resist the violent impulse of their passions, and the threats of the violent. They might—and the sequel has often proved it—have remained the representatives of reason, of justice, of honour.

Suppose, in the third place, a considerable minority. If that minority be in the right, how can we but deplore that want of a few votes which would have sufficed to secure its triumph? If it be in the wrong, how can we be but alarmed at the small number of votes that would have sufficed to make it the majority, and thus given the victory to the wrong side?

Several such inconveniences might be pointed out, going strictly to work, in the votings of any body whatever; but it is easy to see how universal suffrage generalizes and aggravates them.

First of all, beyond a certain limit the number of voters becomes a warranty for nothing, and the will of a country may come to be all the worse expressed the greater the number of votes that have gone to express it. This arises from the desire of coming to a common understanding inevitably concentrating the direction in a number of hands, all the smaller the more numerous the army they have to guide. Unanimity among a hundred electors is more difficult than among a hundred thousand; for the hundred are all fain to preserve their freedom of judgment, whereas, when much more numerous, they feel the necessity of abdicating their own judgment and having chiefs. Hence those results of votings which sometimes satisfy none of the parties that have voted;

hence those instances of choice against which everybody has something to say, and which not the less remain the official expression of the will of all. Can a country desire that which none of its citizens desired? No; but they have been forced to vote for what they hardly wanted, out of dread of bringing about, by dividing themselves, the triumph of that which they did not at all want.

Nothing less free at bottom than those official manifestations of the will of a free people. For one voting which—thanks to the concurrence of certain circumstances—shall have had the characteristics of a genuine spontaneity, perhaps twenty will prove to be but the outward exhibition of an underhand play, acted by a small number of adepts. War was defined by Napoleon—"The art of concentrating on one point, at a given moment, more men than the enemy." Such is universal suffrage. The successes which it procures prove most often, like military successes, merely the good fortune or the ability of the chiefs.

But in war, at least, falsehood and fraud are not accounted ability, and their infamy would not be obliterated by success. Why should it be otherwise in great political struggles? Why so much severity towards the obscure citizen who shall have falsified one bulletin, while so much indulgence is shown towards him who shall have falsified a thousand—nay, ten thousand, by seducing ten thousand citizens, by making them say yes when, had they followed their own consciences, they would have said no? Object not that seduction may have been—and in certain cases in fact has been—perpetrated for the advantage of truth, of justice; you would thus only add a new trait to the condemnation of a system in which reason and justice are forced to speak the language of passion, and where, moreover, even in speaking that language, they have many fewer chances of success than injustice and folly. One

lie has sometimes more influence in an hour than ten truths in a month.

II.—Again—and here we have the most evident, the most palpable of the inconveniences of universal suffrage—see to what fickleness it is subject! Would you call that a wise man whom the slightest circumstances would lead in an instant to change his resolutions, his principles? But this fickleness which you would deem, and justly, absurd and ridiculous in a man, universal suffrage creates and perpetuates among a people. You would consider that you were making quite a mockery of a man, were you to say of him that no one could ever know what he would think or do on the morrow; and do not those jest a little at the expense of peoples, who bring them into a *regime* in which no one shall ever be sure for an hour, for a minute beforehand, of the decision they are about to make? It is seldom, in fact, that the definitive result, should it even prove what you had prognosticated, does not present itself with some unexpected and queer accompaniments—some evident indications that a small matter, almost a nothing, would have made it take quite a different turn. The wisest people is a child when you consult it under this form. Would you consider yourself as showing your respect for a man by bringing him to be no better than a child? Those then who have most true respect for the people, are not those who invite them to the brutal levities of universal suffrage; those who would have laws respected and respectable, are not those who have them voted by the multitude. They know that laws made by them, even when done with enthusiasm and general accord, are always wanting in that certain something which gives durability to human institutions. We feel it by the impression it makes on us, we see it in history. Charters conceded by the sovereign (*octroyées*)

may not be very long-lived, yet they always last longer than constitutions carried by vote. In the ancient republics, all that lived was the work of individuals; what was done by the crowd was incessantly undoing and doing over again. With Solon or Numa, the statue of the law is on a pedestal, a little narrow, to be sure, but of marble; with the multitude it is placed on a heap of sand. People obey, but without respect, without affection; and they who have most exalted in theory the sovereignty of the people, are always and everywhere the first to disobey.

A wit once said that the most solid constitutions are those that have no base. He meant—and who will deny that in this sense he was right?—those that have never been discussed or voted, those that have been made either gradually under the influence of circumstances, or all at once under the authority of one man. The wisest, the justest laws lose their moral authority in passing by popular voting; they contract thereby, in spite of their intrinsic value, an indelible character of levity, of fragility.

How could it be otherwise? These great acts of national sovereignty must not be seen too near; the details, those innumerable petty facts, immoral or ridiculous, those intrigues of every sort, that incontestable nullity of so many suffrages, must all be forgotten. We hear of the *majesty* of the people. This expression, in some cases, may be just; but certainly it is never less so than in those on which the sovereignty of the people has had to exhibit itself in acts, and it is then chiefly that one may say with a great poet: "*Majestas populi*, shall we look for thee in the crowd? Thou hast resided hitherto only in a small number. Some only can count. The rest, as in a lottery, are but a heap of useless tickets in which the good are swamped."\* Moreover, in a crowd, it is never so

\* Schiller.

much the individual wisdoms that tend to form one whole as men's errors, passions, and follies. Affinity exists in some sort only among what is worst or least good; great efforts and favourable circumstances are required to create it among righteous, enlightened, and calm wills, always so much the more divided the more they are conscientious.

### III.—What shall we now say of moral disadvantages?

It was going rather too far, we admit, to suppose a people for ever despoiled of their sovereignty in consequence of having once confided it to the members of a certain family; but is the opposite extreme any wiser? Betwixt a system in which everything was reputed to be eternal, and one in which everything is unceasingly put in question, can no middle course be found?

The right, we have already said, cannot be contested; the sovereignty of the people necessarily appears at the origin of all political power. Accordingly, it is not even a right, we repeat, it is something more positive still; it is a natural, evident, incontestable fact. But what is very far from being either incontestable or natural, is that this right ought to be perpetually called upon to exercise itself, at the risk of inflicting upon itself the most deplorable injuries; for once that the sovereignty of the people has arrived, by dint of being brought into play, at a certain degree of excitation, it is in vain to hope that it will continue to act in accordance with the forms which it shall have at first prescribed to itself. It would fain remain in permanent exercise; it would fain find itself whole and entire wherever one shall be found ready to make a bold appeal to it. The sovereign people will then be no longer the whole people, but some fraction, under the leadership of some men, perhaps of one sole man. The magistrates, elected by the whole nation but yesterday, will find

themselves inferior men to chiefs chosen by acclamation in any meeting held to-day—for the people cannot, you will be told, have abdicated their functions yesterday, and their sovereignty is always there to speak for itself. Did not Rousseau say of magistrates, that “the people can appoint and dismiss them at pleasure”? And as the people cannot always be assembled, it is clear—it has been sufficiently seen in all revolutions—that the right of dismissing the magistrates is remitted, in point of fact, in this system, to whatever party shall find itself for the moment strong enough to put it into exercise.

But let us leave the abuses, albeit one is but too well authorized in our days to consider them as inseparable from the use. Take the case of universal suffrage, exercised with all possible regularity, and follow it into its leading consequences.

Intermediate parties disappear; extremes alone are brought before each other. A few votes more or less in this or that direction, and behold a country made to undergo a thorough and complete change both in the general character and in the details of its internal organisation, of its foreign policy, of its laws, of its very constitution. Shall we be told that these changes have their good side also, and that if they throw you in one day from good into evil and from order into disorder, in one day also they send you back into a path of order and of peace? Yes; but with the chance of your being thrown out of it again in a moment. Of all the methods of knowing a nation's will, that which takes such a leap in the dark can only be regarded as a last shift. The conscientious and serious citizen will ever prefer another course; success obtained by means of universal suffrage will always make him ask, as Cato did: “Have I said anything foolish?” or, rather, “Have I done anything base?”



IV.—Another untoward effect is, the keeping of parties on the alert, by calling on them unceasingly to count up their numbers. Nothing better fitted to perpetuate their mutual animosities than to have always in prospect a fixed day for bringing their quarrel to an issue, and when, not only throughout the country at large, but in every city and in every village, there will be victors and vanquished. Hardly has a battle been gained or lost, hardly have people begun to have some returning sense of their being fellow-citizens and brethren, than a fresh struggle occupies their thoughts, new machinations must be contrived, old grievances recalled, and new ones made the most of.

Nothing, besides, better fitted to sharpen ambitions, and especially bad ambitions, than the periodical possibility of arriving, all at once, and without any special studies, without any previous services, without serious claims of any sort, at the very highest positions. Courts have seen rapid and scandalous rises; they have seen none so rapid or so scandalous as many of these; and what happened once or twice in a reign, we see happening in democracies every day. The temptation accordingly is strong, irresistible. The worst means offer themselves as the surest, and too often they actually are so. People contrive to make for themselves, in politics, a conscience and principles by which they would be horrified at being influenced in ordinary life. The noblest ambition is compelled to have recourse to expedients that are ignoble, and, if it preserve its purity, it loses its dignity. More baseness is perpetrated in word and deed in a month at the court of the sovereign people, than it took a long time to witness at the court of Louis XIV.; and there was preserved there, even in its degradation, a certain nobleness which it has been found necessary to shake off.

Another source of demoralization is to be found in the re-

spect which men habituate themselves to entertain for the decisions of the mob.

We do not speak, it will be seen, of legal respect. That ought, on the contrary, to be recommended, for if a minority conceives itself entitled to disobey, there is no longer any government possible. What, therefore, we have here in view is real and inward respect, the influence exercised by the multitude on the opinions, and even on the moral sentiments, of too many. Few will go so far as to say, as Rousseau did by implication, that the decrees of the people are the standard of justice and injustice, that what it desires is good because it desires it, that what it repels is bad because it repels it ; but men allow themselves to regard the people as, up to a certain point, the judge of morality and right. The most condemnable acts are considered as absolved as soon as sanctioned by a vote ; they may not on that account be pronounced good, but they cease to excite indignation. In the affairs that fall under our reason we see the same weakness. When universal suffrage has condemned an idea, those who supported it will not say that they were in the wrong, but many will cease to say they were in the right, and more than one, in ceasing to say so, will cease to think so. Where, at the present day, shall we find the man, just and *tenacious*, as the poet says, whom the ruins of the universe would crush without moving him ? A scrutiny suffices to lead many to entertain doubts of their own reason and even of their own conscience. Those that are no better than cowards, are delighted at the idea of sheltering themselves behind the old proverb that speaks of " the voice of the people being the voice of God."

V.—The grand evil and the grand danger of universal suffrage is, that it seems to be founded on nature, whereas, in point of fact, it reposes on a fiction, perhaps the strongest too,

that has ever entered into any combination of government. What are the fictions called constitutional, even that which has been most attacked as absurd—the sovereign's irresponsibility, in comparison with that which assumes that all citizens have the same capacity for forming a sound judgment, and the same moral right to influence the country's destinies? Who would have aught to do with such a fiction for the smallest interests of his own fortune? Who would hesitate between the advice of one single person competent to give advice, and that of a hundred, of a thousand others whom he knows to be incompetent? Here are two citizens setting off together to deposit their votes. The one we shall suppose to be a person universally acknowledged to be serious, well informed, capable. The other—let us see; he will perhaps be a peasant, a fine fellow in the main, but who would tremble at the thought of addressing in any other place a single word to the person whom he is elbowing at this moment; or he may be a man from the city, less ignorant, but who would think quite as little, in all other matters, of comparing himself with the first; or he may be a mere ninny, who openly confesses that he knows nothing about the matter in hand, and is asking everybody how he should act; or possibly a ninny of another kind, who fancies himself a very able person because he has got his cue beforehand at the alehouse or the club; perhaps—but there is no end of such suppositions. What is certain is, that you would always find five or six of this kind for one whose judgment has any weight, and perhaps twenty for one whom you would like to consult on your own affairs. But there they are, all held equal, in the mean time, for pronouncing on their country's destinies!

But to what result would we come? Shall we call for the abolition of universal suffrage? In great states it will be abolished sufficiently of itself; in the small, how shall it be

replaced? Besides, this is not a political discussion. All that has now been read, was written previous to the grand scandals given by universal suffrage within the last twelve months. Particular results more conformable or more contrary to our principles, our desires, would not have led us to change a single word.

We were speaking of the theories of the eighteenth century; we have been able, without travelling out of theory, to point out the errors into which the writers of that time were thrown by the want of practical application. Voltaire himself, after all the evil he said of democracy, still deceived himself as to its effects. "Discord," he says,\* "will reign there as in a monastery; but there will be no St. Bartholomew, no Sicilian Vespers, no Inquisition." Alas! we have seen worse than all that; and if there be republics, as happily there are, where democracy has led to no such results, they are republics established on different principles from those of the eighteenth century.

Let us not conclude, in consequence, either for or against universal suffrage in itself. Let us keep to seeing clearly what it is in the eyes of the wise.

Have you to direct the application of it? Since the system is false in itself, as the basis of an equality which does not exist, you must try to make it a little less false in practice, by lessening the inequality of intelligence, by teaching all to examine, to judge, but by themselves, with their own conscience and their own common sense. It is true that the worst newspaper will always, at the moment of a voting, have more authority than all you shall have said or written for the enlightening of the suffrages of the crowd; but it is not impossible that in the course of time, God and misfortune aiding, the education of the people may be accomplished.

\* *Philosophical Dictionary.*

Speak much to them of their duties, little of their rights. Enough, others will speak to them of these, and it will suffice that they know that you don't contest them. Had not Montesquieu and Rousseau been absorbed with the question of rights, we should not have been where we are now. The mistake was perhaps excusable at an epoch when rights were denied; at present, when they are denied no longer, it is no more a mistake, it is a falsehood and a crime.

Have you, simple citizen, nothing to do but to submit to results, be these what they may? Submit, but preserve at the same time your freedom as a man. Do not see in the chances of the ballot-box either successes or reverses. Do not think yourself in the right merely because it shall have agreed with you, or in the wrong because it shall have gone against you; neither excuse nor condemn any one soever, because the multitude shall have excused or condemned him. Seek for your convictions elsewhere. Recognise, as your only judges, conscience and reason.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

- I.—How much the people were, at bottom, despised—Rousseau—Montesquieu—Voltaire—The mob—Dogs, wolves.
- II.—There was little sense of human dignity—*Man* and *men* in the eighteenth century—*Man* and *men* in the Christian system.
- III.—Liberty not understood—Views entertained of toleration and religion—Omnipotence attributed to the State—Montesquieu.—IV.—Rousseau and his *civil* religion—Death to all who should not observe it—Rousseau in accord with the Archbishop of Paris on the question of the French Protestants—What fruits all this bore in politics.
- V.—Still despotism—Gallani—Gibbon—Voltaire—Infidelity alone appeared to him to deserve being free—Relations between Church and State—Intolerance was merely made to change its place—Rousseau grants, in fact, infallibility to the Sovereign—Voltaire would have the absolute submission of the Church—One of his complaints against *Athalie*.

BUT contempt of the people considered as a judge, ought not to involve contempt of the people as composed of men, of intelligent beings requiring to be enlightened, of beings with sensibilities inviting our love.

Here, then, there is one point more on which the eighteenth century ought not to be our guide.

In fact, with all the economical sentimentalities and the absolute dogma of the sovereignty of the people, great was the contempt entertained for the masses, and great the forgetfulness of their positive interests. Rousseau himself had very little the appearance of a man who cared much about them. The people, in his writings, are like an army in the com-

binations of a general. He needs them for purposes of conquest, and his love for them hardly goes beyond that need. The people make his god, viewed collectively ; but in detail, he hardly distinguishes them from those great ones to whom he attributes all the vices. He would bring up Emile in the country, "far from the *canaille* of valets, the lowest of men." It is true that he adds, "after their masters ;" but there we have valets, servants in general—for he makes no distinction, characterized as *canaille*, which is neither very charitable nor very just, and, above all, not very democratical. Emile, his pupil, is anything but a child of the people, and his education is anything but calculated to give him feelings in common with the multitude. He goes, to be sure, since such is his Mentor's desire, to work with a carpenter ; but to all appearance his connexion with the real people was to go no farther than this. The education of the working classes does not fall within the sphere of Rousseau's meditations. Possibly, too, he may have avoided a subject on which he would have had to speak practically, and where the fragility of his system would have been but too apparent. At all events, the most determined champion of the higher classes would not have dared to say so little about the people in a treatise on education.

Montesquieu names the people often ; but he hardly knows how to attach any other meaning to the term than the abstract one of which we have been speaking. The people, the real people, he hardly recognises more in those around him than in the republics of former times ; and he evidently as little sought to make himself acquainted with them in order to his writing the *Spirit of Laws*, as Rousseau sought the acquaintance of children in order to his writing *Emile*. One finds all to be redolent of the man who had seen the nation in the drawing-rooms of Paris, and who would be ready to

say with the chroniclers of Versailles, *The whole of France*, instead of *The whole court*. Listen to him: "Women have little reserve in monarchies, because the distinction of ranks calling them to court, they there acquire that spirit of liberty which," &c.\* Thus the ladies at court are *the women*. What does not belong to the court has no existence.

Voltaire—and it is a trait which would hardly be forgiven him at the present day, but that his friends take care to say nothing about it—Voltaire teaches, in many places, that the enlightenment of the people should not even be attempted; he even goes so far, and this assuredly, in him, implies the last degree of contempt, as to say that even their conversion to infidelity should not be attempted. In a letter to the King of Prussia,† we find him say: "Your Majesty will do an eternal service to the human race by destroying that infamous superstition, ‡ I do not say among the *canaille*, who are not worth being enlightened, and for whom all yokes are proper, but among persons of credit, among men who think. . . . It is for you to feed their souls; it is for you to give white bread to the children of the family, and to leave the black bread to the dogs."

Thus, if he laughs at the privileges of the ancient aristocracy, if he teaches that aristocracy itself to laugh at them, it is that it may be replaced by a new aristocracy of science and learning, of good taste, above all of infidelity—for even though a person of taste and science, if you have these accompanied with religion, you remain in the mob of hypocrites and blockheads. "The Turks," he writes to the Marquis d'Argens,§ "maintain that their Alcoran has sometimes the face of an angel, sometimes that of a beast. This account of the Alcoran well agrees with the times in which we live. There are some philosophers; there you have the faces of

\* Book viii. ch. 8.

† Jan. 1757.

‡ Christianity.

§ Aug. 1762.



angels ; elsewhere you have a strong resemblance to the countenances of beasts." "Reckon not as your neighbour," he writes further to Helvetius, "any but those that think, and look upon the rest of men as the wolves, the foxes, and the deer that inhabit our forests."

These dogs, these wolves, are not only persons of uncultivated minds, but all who have been daring enough not to salute the torch of the new doctrines. "The starched Lutheran, the savage Calvinist, the haughty Anglican, the fanatical Jansenist, the Jesuit who believes that he must always play the master, even in exile and under the gallows . . . all break loose against the philosopher. They are so many dogs of different sorts that howl in their several manners against a fine horse feeding 'on some verdant lawn.'"\* In fine : "We shall soon have new heavens and a new earth," he writes to D'Alembert—"I mean for people of credit ; for as for the *canaille*, the stupidest heaven and the stupidest earth are all that they require."

Thus spoke the master ; thus repeated the disciples.

II.—These men felt little respect, then, for the dignity of human nature, who said so much about it in their books, and held it so cheap in the greater number of their fellows. It is one thing to exalt *man*, quite another thing to respect and to love *men*.

*Man*, the ideal *man*, they placed upon the altar. Individual pride found its account in this vague apotheosis, the honours of which each decerned complacently to himself. "It is of man that I have to speak," says Rousseau in the opening of his discourse on inequality ; "and the question that I have to examine teaches me that I have to speak to men, for people don't propose such questions when they are afraid to

\* *Philosophical Dictionary.*

honour truth." It was thought pleasant to oppose the word *man*, in its haughty nakedness, to the brilliant titles in use among men. In speaking of a dethroned sovereign, but one who was great in his adversity: "From the rank of a king," said Rousseau again,\* "which a coward, a rogue, or a fool may fill as well as any other, he rises to the state of man, which so few men know how to fill." To educate a king, according to Maury,† "is to make a king from a man, *or rather a man from a king.*" Voltaire, in some verses in honour of the Count de Clermont, a prince of the blood, said:‡

"I thought to see a prince, and lo! I found a man."...

And in a letter to Maupertuis,§ whom he was afterwards so to traduce: "There is none but the King of Prussia that I put on a level with you, for he is of all kings the least of a king and the most of a man."

Man was almost a god, then; as for *men*, on the contrary, they reserved to themselves the right of despising and abandoning all of them in whom this ideal was not realized; it being well understood that you could not in any case realize it beyond the philosophical rules of the epoch.

To this the Christian system is diametrically opposite.

*Man* it despises. It would have us consider him, both in others and in ourselves, as a fallen and impotent being, who has not really in himself either his strength or his virtues.

As for *men*, on the contrary, it teaches us to see in each of them, we will not say a brother—for the philosophers taught that, and it leads to no great result,—but a soul—a being whom God Himself could not despise without despising Himself in some sort, because He has made him in His own image, and has assigned him a place to fill, and a part to act, in His eternal counsels.

Such are the two systems; and though the latter had no

\* *Emile*, Book iii.

† *Eloge* on Fénelon.

‡ 1731.

§ 1740.

divine teaching for its basis, although we were to judge it as a mere human doctrine, we might still ask which of the two is most conformed to facts, most fruitful in the results of peace, serious fraternity, and true liberty.

III.—The question of man's dignity was accordingly ill understood ; that of liberty, thenceforward, could not fail to be so too.

We have seen the germs of political despotism which the theories of Montesquieu, of Rousseau, and their disciples involved. Other despotisms were there, and more than in the germ.

Religious liberty, which is not only the most natural in itself, but which, one would suppose, the thinkers of that epoch had a great interest in preaching, they did not preach, and they even furnished weapons for those who refused to grant it.

They furnished such weapons, in the first place, by letting it be seen that they did not think toleration compatible with faith. When Voltaire wrote, in 1764 : " Men will never be induced to be forbearing in fanaticism," everybody very well knew that *fanaticism*, under his pen, signified faith. Toleration and infidelity thus presented themselves as inseparably united ; all abandonment of the old rigours seemed an abandonment of the old dogmas, and, in fact, it was so—thanks to the eagerness with which Voltaire and his followers gave it that meaning.

We have said how indifferent they continued to be, until the affair of John Calas, to the calamities of French Protestants ; we have seen with what levity the author of the *Henriade*, after having sung of them in the sixteenth century, abandoned them in the eighteenth, as men behind the age, as almost traitors, because, after having proclaimed freedom of inquiry, they refused to push it as far as infidelity.

This silence on the part of the freethinkers with respect to them, was, moreover, an encouragement not to spare them, for it came in aid of a doctrine which the Government began to profess, for the purpose of giving a sort of sanction to its rigours. 'It pretended to have abandoned persecution on the score of religion. The Protestants were free to damn themselves, but they were to be held bound, as subjects, to obey the edicts interdicting their worship. They were punished accordingly as rebels, not as Protestants. Such was the wretched quibble by which so many men, who, one would think, ought to have been their advocates, allowed their mouths to be shut.

But these men went much beyond this. If, on the one hand, they refused to the civil authority the right of fixing and imposing doctrines properly so called, they restored this right, in point of fact, on the other hand, by the extent of the powers which they acknowledged the Government to possess in affairs of ecclesiastical and religious police.

"It will be a very good civil law," Montesquieu had said,\* "when the State is satisfied as to the religion already established, not to tolerate the setting up of another."

Here we have the *State* taken in that absolute sense which, given to the word "people," leads, we have demonstrated, to despotism. The State is necessarily always, in reality, either its chief, or its chiefs, or a majority of the citizens. It is, therefore, after all, to a part of the people that Montesquieu gives the power of "not tolerating" that another part of the people should modify their religion; and by this *not tolerating* is evidently meant persecuting—for one does not see what else can be done but to persecute in case of the minority not obeying the prohibition.

Montesquieu adds, it is true, that on this new religion being

\* *Spirit of Laws*, Book xxv. chap. 2.

once established in a State, it must be tolerated. Here we have an air of greater liberality, but, in reality, the same despotism.

In the first place, the very word *tolerate* involves by implication the negation of religious liberty. Wherever it is acknowledged as a right, the word is banished. There is really no more room for *tolerating* the rights of conscience than for *tolerating* paternal authority, the rights of property, natural rights in general.

But even should there be nothing more here, in Montesquieu, than an inadvertence of language, what signifies, after his first assertions, this liberty which he demands for religious opinions? "*On this new religion being once established in a State,*" he says. But what does *established* mean? shall this religion be considered as established by the mere fact of a certain number of men having begun to profess it, or must it have the recognition of the State? If it suffice that some profess it, this is tantamount to saying that the State has nothing to do with such matters; if it is not to be considered as established, and to be tolerated until after the State has recognised it, we are at once brought back to the complete negation of religious liberty.

IV.—These generalities, already too pregnant with oppressive consequences, Rousseau develops with a desperate precision. He extends to the domain of religion the empire of all the rights with which we have seen him invest the sovereign, that is, the people. "It is of importance to the State," he says,\* "that every citizen should have a religion such as shall make him love his duties; but this religion must be purely civil, and the sovereign alone must fix its articles."

But if any one have the right to fix these articles, what

\* *Contrat Social*.

does it matter whether it be the *sovereign*, that is to say, a majority, or any corporation whatsoever of doctors? Individual faith is no longer free.

"These articles," he says, "will not be exactly religious dogmas, but sentiments of sociability, without which it is impossible for a man to be a good citizen and loyal subject."

Sentiments thrown into articles? This is not clear. But let us proceed. He comes to be obliged himself, in explaining his meaning, to enumerate what are really doctrines. "The existence of the Divine Being, omnipotent, omniscient, foreseeing all and providing for all, the life to come, the blessedness of the righteous, the punishment of the wicked." Here we find ourselves almost arrived at Christianity.

But if the *sovereign*—always, let us not forget, a majority—has the right to impose these four articles, how refuse it the right to impose others? Rousseau adds one, in fact, which sins in the opposite excess—for if these are really religious dogmas improperly ranked among civil matters, that last—"The sanctity of the social contract and of the laws"—is a civil article still more improperly ranked among religious ideas.

Thus we have ever the same omnipotence. Here we have the sanctity of the laws placed on the same line with the existence of God. It is not enough that the laws be obeyed; one must *believe* in them, must submit his mind and heart to them; the decrees of the sovereign must be divinized.

And what think you is the sanction of these several articles? Listen:—"He who does not believe in these dogmas ought to be banished from the State, not as an impious person"—ever the same quibble so humanely taken advantage of under Louis XIV. against the French dissenters, whether Protestants or Jansenists—"but as wanting in sociability, as incapable of sincerely loving the laws, and sacrificing, when

required, his life to his duty. If any one, after having publicly recognised these same dogmas, conducts himself as if he did not believe in them, let him be *punished with death*."

Shall we, after this, be astonished at the relish which he has more than once allowed to peep out, in his writings, if not for the special dogmas of the Church of Rome, at least for its system? It is that Church that has realized up to the highest point—either in her theories, or, wherever she has had the power, in her acts—the omnipotence of the majority, the absorption of the individual in the mass; it is she that has most formally exacted for her decrees, not obedience only, but faith.

In his famous letter to the Archbishop of Paris, there is a point on which the philosopher is almost at one with the prelate, and that point is the refusal of religious liberty. Explain who can how this can be reconciled in the mind of Rousseau with his recriminations on the prosecutions to which he was subjected; but the stranger this concession at such a moment, the better does it prove how far his system was from resulting in liberty. Had not despotism been deeply rooted in the premisses, should we have found it in the conclusion, when Rousseau had every interest in preventing it from being seen there?

"I do not believe, then," he says further, "that one can legitimately introduce foreign religions into a country without the sovereign's permission, for if it be not direct disobedience to God, it is disobedience to the laws, and he who disobeys the laws disobeys God." Elsewhere again: "I frankly admit that at its origin, the Reformed religion had no right to establish itself in France in spite of the laws."

Thus, even while calling for toleration for the present, he allows to subsist, nay, he consolidates the foundations of the despotism which in former times refused that toleration, and still refuses it. "They are quite different things," he says,

“to embrace a new religion, and to remain in that in which you were born. The first alone is punishable.” Louis XV. did therefore wrong in persecuting the Protestants, but Francis I. did right.

Is the question at this day settled? On the domain of religion we hope it is; on the political and social domain it has assumed in our days an importance which it did not at that epoch possess. Never has the despotism of the masses, never has the annihilation of the individual conscience been so openly preached, as the ultimate result and the supreme reality of democracy. In seeing to what the doctrines of Rousseau lead, and to what they had already led himself, one may well ask if it was indeed by the charm of liberty that he made himself so many disciples, and if it was not rather by the charm of despotism—by the facilities which he offers to whoever would have power, always in the name of liberty.

V.—For themselves, then, there was demanded a liberty without bounds, but despotic sympathies were allowed to peep out, were even openly displayed. These sympathies existed by the side of liberalism, as materialism existed by the side of polished manners and mental elegance; they constituted, to speak more correctly, but one of the forms of that materialism itself.

The Abbé Galiani, the amiable and witty talker at the dinners of Helvetius, would say that he owned no master in politics but Machiavel, no principle but despotism—*very crude, very green.*

Gibbon, in consequence of having entered upon history with the principles of Rousseau, could not be consistent with himself did he not preach up the reign of force, the oblivion of man's dignity and of the rights of conscience. He excuses, he approves pagan persecutions, not indeed, like Voltaire, cut



of hatred to Christianity, but coldly and systematically. His sole reason was that of Montesquieu and Rousseau—new religions must not be tolerated.

Voltaire, the defender of the Calases, hardly attributed a smaller amount of rights to the civil authority, provided only they be used according to infidel principles.

“The philosophic prince,” he would say, for example,\* “will prevent people from disputing about doctrines.”

That there should be such disputes is to be lamented; that a prince should endeavour to prevent and to moderate them, is to be desired; but that he should have the right to suppress them, amounts to saying that liberty of thought shall be destroyed.

Elsewhere,† Voltaire accords to the French government the right of interdicting all worship to the Protestants.

Elsewhere :‡ “The man who is called a Jansenist,” says he, “is really a fool, a bad citizen, and a rebel.”

“He is a fool,” he goes on to say, “because he confounds his own personal ideas with demonstrated truths.”

This is Roman Catholic despotism—that of Lamennais, in his *Essay on Indifference*; there is folly in a man’s believing himself in the right when he thinks differently from the generality of men.

“The Jansenist is a bad citizen, because he troubles the order of the State.”

This is the despotism of opinions; whoever is not a citizen after a certain manner, is a bad citizen.

In fine: “The Jansenist is a rebel, because he disobeya.”

This is royal despotism. It was with this phrase that the Jansenists were sent to the Bastille and the Protestants to the galleys.

\* *La Voix du Sage et du Peuple*—(The Voice of the Sage and the People).

† *Pot-Pourri*.

‡ *Philosophical Dictionary*.

We shall not ask, however, as we have done above in the case of Rousseau, how declarations of this kind were reconciled, in the mind of Voltaire, with the indignation into which he was thrown by the slightest attempt to suppress freedom of speech among the philosophers. One may be satisfied that this contradiction by no means escaped himself; he had too much acuteness and too little real passion not to perceive that he was refusing to others what he largely conceded to himself. Protestants, Jesuits, Jansenists, all who had a crow to pluck with the Government, he abandoned—and that too right heartily—to the umbrageous disquietude of the civil power, happy in being able to procure for himself, at their expense, some days of favour or of respite—happy too, as he so often confessed, to set by the ears all those whom, one and all, he equally disliked. Principles, meanwhile, the question of right, he left untouched; and not he alone, but all those who had the air of studying those questions in no other point of view than that of right. What do Montesquieu's considerations on religious liberty amount to? To a frigid inquiry into what may or may not be conveniently conceded on that point. On what ground does Rousseau urge his demand that the Protestants should be left unmolested? On the Edict of Nantes, which he insists that Louis XIV. had no right to revoke. A flagrant contradiction this—for what is founded on one edict may be destroyed by another; and if you admit that Henry IV. might have refused to grant the Edict of Nantes, you must admit that Louis XIV. could revoke it.

People seemed to cry up liberty, but, after all, only found their way back, by other paths, to Bossuet's doctrine, that "There can be no recourse against the sovereign but the sovereign himself." And what Bossuet accorded to a sovereign, subject otherwise to the laws of religion, and responsible at least to God, they accorded to the people, an irresponsible

sovereign, that is to say, to a being which comes to dissolution in this world, and on which God himself has no chastisements to inflict in another life.

Thus, in this grand question of the relations betwixt Church and State, the writers of the philosophical school only gave to the State what they took from the Church. Toleration thus understood was only intolerance transposed. The sovereign, people or king, became the head of religion; in order to remove the altar from above the throne, the only device was to place the throne on the altar. Mark well, that they did not even stop at a nominal supremacy, like that of some Protestant monarchs or of the Emperor of Russia; it is a real popedom, it is the right of fixing doctrines, it is infallibility with all its consequences, that Rousseau assigns to the sovereign. Voltaire, without entering into equally explicit details, equally teaches the absolute submission of the Church. He will no more hear a word said of the distinction of the two powers than of the system in which one of the two, the spiritual, was everything; there is but one, in fact, he says, but it is the temporal. One of his complaints against the *Athalie* of Racine, is that we find there a priest in revolt against a queen. That queen is a usurper, and the rightful king exists. It matters not! Joad is guilty from the sole fact of his not having submitted. "Is it true," writes Voltaire,\* "that *Athalie* has been acted, and that the public has at length perceived that Joad was in the wrong and *Athalie* in the right?" Ever despotism absolved, provided that it repose on certain foundations or be directed to certain ends. *Athalie* had committed crimes, but then *Athalie* persecuted the Jews. That is enough. "*Athalie* is in the right."

\* To D'Argental, 1761.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

- I.—No degrees in materialism—Rousseau but little above Voltaire ; Voltaire little above *La Mettrie*—Poison for a purgative.
- II.—Whence comes, according to Voltaire, the idea of the soul ?—He affects to represent the question as beyond our reach—The *Quinze-Vingts* and their dresses—He would fain see nothing in religion but mysteries, and nothing but folly in those who occupy themselves with it.
- III.—“ I am a body, and I think ”—The two *I*'s—To materialize elucidates nothing—*Helvetius* and *Cabanis*—Voltaire liked to exhibit the mind under the yoke of the body—The puppets of Providence.
- IV.—What God was in the view of the deists of the eighteenth century—How and in what spirit Voltaire believed in God—He was embarrassed by the universe—And by God also—He insensibly arrives at atheistic conclusions—Thinking matter—The eternity of matter—His Majesty Chance.
- V.—King of Prussia's chaplain—Madame du Deffand's confessor—Death is nothing—To play with life—To die, if possible, like a dog.—VI.—How did Voltaire die ?—A letter from Tronchin—Anguish—Tempest of feeling—Emptiness and nothing.
- VII.—The idea of God among others—*Montesquieu*—*Buffon*—*Rousseau*—He would not have children spoken to about it.

THESE despotic instincts, we said, were but one of the forms of the materialism that was so universal at that epoch. Let us now look at this feature, and see how it equally dominated over all the manifestations of thought, not excepting those that appeared to repudiate it.

What it is of special importance that we should well understand, is that there are no degrees in materialism. In vain would you stop, from fright or from genius, at some apparently intermediate idea between spiritualism and it : a little

logic suffices for compelling you to relax your hold and roll downward, in spite of yourself, into absolute materialism.

People have habituated themselves to establish, among the men of the eighteenth century, distinctions which will not hold their ground in the light of serious inquiry.

We have already shown the mistake into which those have fallen who look upon Rousseau as having done a different work from Voltaire. We would say the same of those who look upon Voltaire as quite a different philosopher from the gross materialists from whom he affected to separate himself.

"La Mettrie," he writes in 1750,\* "has unwillingly written a bad book,† in which he proscribes virtue and remorse, eulogizes the vices, invites his reader to all disorders, and all this without any bad intention. His book contains a thousand fiery darts, but not half a page of reason; they are like lightnings in the night. People of sense have thought it advisable to remonstrate with him on the enormity of his morality. He was quite astonished; he knew not what he had written; he will write the contrary to-morrow, if wanted. God preserve me from having him for my physician! He would give me corrosive sublimate instead of rhubarb, and then begin to laugh."

Is there in these lines a single trait that does not apply more or less both to Voltaire and to all his school? We shall say, if you will, as he said of La Mettrie, that his intentions were good; but it is a sad excuse for men who spoke of regenerating the human race. La Mettrie proscribed virtue; did they make much account of it? La Mettrie preached vice; did they seriously condemn it? La Mettrie had fiery darts; many hardly had these. He had not half a page of reason; had they many whole pages? He was "quite astonished" on being remonstrated with about "the enormity of his mo-

\* Letter to Madame Denis.

† *L'Homme-machine*—(The Man-machine).

reality;" they too would have been astonished, and more than astonished, had they seen theirs put in practice twenty years afterwards. Alas! corrosive sublimate instead of rhubarb—poison instead of a purge; was not this more or less what all the physicians of humanity were giving at that epoch? And who more than Voltaire gave it with a grin of laughter? "My body suffers much; my soul, if I have one, which is very doubtful, is tenderly attached to you, to the entire dissolution of my individuality."\* Did La Mettrie say much more than this? Is he, in denying the soul, very far from denying virtue?

II.—But here perhaps there was only a few rash words, a mischievous piece of wit, not a system. Well then, let us listen to his reasoning.

Let us see, first, where he affects to find the very idea of the soul—of an immaterial principle.

"There were formed, in the course of time, societies a little civilized, in which a small number of men could have leisure for reflection. It must have happened that a man, sensibly affected with the death of his father or of his mother, had seen in a dream the person whose absence he regretted. Two or three dreams of that kind would have disquieted a whole tribe. Here is a dead person reappearing to the living; and yet this dead person, eaten by worms, still remains in the same place. It is something, therefore, that was in him, that moves about in the air—it is his soul."†

Here at once we have what is stronger, in reality, than all that had been said before him on those subjects. He does not confine himself to the denial of the soul's existence, he affects not to understand how man could have found the idea in himself. Nothing more natural, nevertheless, even while

\* Letter to D'Argental, 1773.

† *Essay on Manners*. Introduction.

denying it, than to see that people believed in it, because, right or wrong, they were conscious of possessing other faculties besides those of the body. But no! He would consider himself doing too much honour to spiritualism in supposing it to be imagined by reason, even when led astray; he must, forsooth, look for its origin in a dream.

Elsewhere :\* "We venture," says he, "to question whether the intelligent soul be spirit or matter—whether, after having animated us one day on earth, it lives after us in eternity. These questions appear sublime; what are they? Questions put by some blind people saying to other blind people: What is light?"

He was fond of this idea, and he has often reproduced it; he has even made it the basis of one of his tales.

The scene is at the hospital of the Quinze-Vingts.† After having been for a long time happy and united, the blind allow themselves, one fine day, to be persuaded that they must come to a decision about the colour of their dress. One of them, whom they have allowed to assume an unlimited authority, decides that their dress is white. "The blind believed him. They spoke of nothing but their white dresses, although not one of them was white. Everybody laughed at them. They went and complained to the dictator, who gave them a very bad reception. He treated them as innovators, freethinkers, rebels." Long controversies were the result; and the dictator decreed at last that the dresses were red. Now, they were neither red nor white. The blind were again laughed at. Thereupon there arose fresh debates, heats, and animosities without end, until the moment when it was resolved that all further inquiry should be abandoned, and that people should hold their peace. "A deaf person," the author

\* *Philosophical Letters.*

† An hospital founded by Louis IX. (St. Louis) for three hundred blind men.—*Trans.*

adds, "maintained that the blind had done wrong to judge of colours, but remained firm in the opinion that it belonged to the deaf alone to judge of music." Voltaire liked to finish with one of those shafts, which he lets fly, like the Parthian, in retreating.

The story is good, but is the idea just? Yes, if we don't go beyond what it seems to say; No, if we recollect—and how can we but recollect?—the meaning Voltaire intends it to convey. Men have too often pronounced upon things that will be for ever concealed from us in this world; but Voltaire affected to put into the number of those things on which in fact we cannot pronounce but at random, and as blind men would do, all those which more or less remotely bear upon religion. That same human reason which he could so well deify when he had occasion to speak in its name, he pronounced to be utterly incapable of comprehending anything of what has been taught on God and the soul. With this dismissal of the case, he thinks he may dispense with the discussion of it, and, without appearing to do so, denies the whole.

III.—Long before this short story, so pregnant with consequences, he had said: \* "I am corporeal, and I think; shall I attribute to an unknown cause that which I can so easily attribute to the only second cause that I know of?" Here again we have materialism, and a vicious circle to boot. It is true, no doubt, that we know matter; but do we know it in so far as it is connected with thought, and the cause—it matters not to what degree—of phenomena of that order? In this point of view, it is quite as much unknown to us as spirit. We cannot therefore say: "I am corporeal, and I think;" for that is to state as a fact precisely what is in question—namely, whether these two *I's* are the same being.

\* *Philosophical Letters.*



Is it true, besides, that we can easily attribute thought to matter? Thought is a mystery we cannot indeed understand, as either in mind or in body; but if we are to choose, it is certainly in the body that we comprehend it least.

It was always believed—and this was one of the grand mistakes of that epoch—that to materialize questions was to elucidate them. Often, as we have seen, it is rather the contrary; at the most, after having plunged deep into matter, we shall find ourselves confronted with the same difficulty. In order to escape from an eternal God, whom, he says, he does not comprehend, the atheist will have recourse to the eternity of matter; as if the idea of eternity, wherever we may place it, were not essentially beyond our conception. To explain thought by the body, the one—Helvetius, for example—you will find keeping to the gross springs of our physical organization; the other—Cabanis, if you will—you will find studying the more subtle, and making the brain “a stomach for the digestion and secretion of ideas.” Which, on the whole, is the more advanced? Because Cabanis shocks you less, would you forthwith conclude that you understand him better? From the moment that we have to do with thought, a microscopical nerve is quite as material as a leg or an arm.

But Voltaire does not even attempt to rise to those less gross ideas which, if they explain nothing better, show, nevertheless, that people at least are dissatisfied with the others. He delights in pointing out all those relations betwixt thought and matter which an impure imagination can suggest; he takes a pleasure in observing them in himself, and his familiar correspondence abounds in ignoble details. Should he ever rise a little higher, should he abandon himself, by chance, to some purer impression, he hastens to redescend into the stolid realities of matter. “When I disembarked near London, it was in the midst of Spring. The sky was without a cloud, as

in the finest weather of the south of France. The air was refreshed by a gentle west wind which augmented the serenity of nature, and disposed the mind to joy." Here we have what is fresh and charming; but of this, it would seem, he repents. "So completely are we machines," he adds, "and so much do our souls depend on the action of our bodies!" But, after all, what is this compared to the icy materialism of his old age? What cynicism! What contempt for his white hairs! "One would say that he was afraid of being looked upon with veneration."\* We feel pained, we blush to behold a mind of such capacity divert itself with saying that it was only flesh and mud, and was about to dissolve along with the fibres which had produced it. "The thinking faculty loses itself in the eating, the drinking, and the digesting faculty. The puppets of infinite Providence are not made to last so long as it."† A fine destiny for us, forsooth, and still more, a fine destiny for *infinite Providence*! But Voltaire would not scruple even to invoke God, if necessary, the better to be able to deny the existence of the soul. In one of his letters to Father Tournemine,‡ he says that it is offering an insult to God when people would set such limits to His power, as to maintain that He could not have given thought to matter.

IV.—What, then, was God for Voltaire, and, in general, for the non-atheist philosophers of the eighteenth century?

Voltaire was almost the only one who, denying the existence of the soul, declared his belief in the being of God. Could he, in this way, have really believed in it? Let us see.

All the proofs of the existence of God he has given, and remarkably well, in several of his works, particularly in 1734, in a special treatise; but he has generally failed in answering

\* Lacrosette.

† Letter to Madame Necker, 1773.

‡ 1735.

the objections of atheists, and, moreover, has often let it be seen how little he cared about resolving them.

Could he answer them? No. Beyond a certain circle of ideas, the being of God can be demonstrated only imperfectly and by halves. There are no degrees in materialism, we said. If you have embraced it at all, you cannot logically fall short of embracing it altogether. To abandon all else, and to save God, is impossible.

Now it was precisely, it would appear, that he might be the better entitled to abandon all else, that Voltaire so persisted in keeping to the belief in God. It was in vain for him to combat atheism: you feel that if you were atheistic, you might ask why he was not so too, so impossible does it appear to you that he should not have been so. The universe embarrassed him, he would have told you, and he could not think

"This watch could be, and watchmaker have none."

Yes, in fact, the universe did *embarrass* him. One feels that he would have been better pleased not to have met on his path this universe so untowardly admirable, which compelled him to believe in something, and one is ready to forgive those who saw nothing but irony in that other famous line:—

"If God were not, one must invent a God."

Voltaire also, as is proved by this verse, argued too much for the necessity of a God to put a restraint on the enterprises of men.\* It is one thing to adduce this result as a fact, another to produce it as an argument. That the thought of God is a restraint is evident; but don't go to tell us that it is

\* In that same passage he rests upon it at length:—

"What fruit from these fine arguments do you expect to draw?  
Your children, will they look on you with greater love and awe?  
Your friends, will they, in time of need, more helpful be and warm?  
Your wife more faithful? Or the man that occupies your farm,  
Do you expect that he his rent will better pay because  
He disbelieves in God, and scorns all rule but human laws?"

for this purpose that He exists, for we should thus have reason to suspect that you believe in Him from interested motives, that you speak of Him from prudence. Did Voltaire believe in Him any otherwise? It may be much doubted. One day, it was said, as two or three of his friends were outrivalling each other in talking atheism, he begged them to speak low, lest the servants should hear. "I have no wish to have my throat cut to-night," he added. In his writings, even the best of them, faith in God nowhere appears to us as a felt want of his heart and of his soul. It was a matter of good taste to distinguish him from the mob of atheists; a rampart against those whom absolute materialism might render too enterprising. One feels that had he been alone in the world, or had there been none but honest people here below, he would hardly have felt so much need of demonstrating the being of God to himself, or of demonstrating it to others. Even in demonstrating it, he has always the air of one who believes in it because he cannot do otherwise. His pride is humbled, one would say, at having to proclaim a being greater, wiser, stronger than man. God embarrasses him at least as much as the universe does.

Accordingly, we see him arriving insensibly, towards the close of his life, at all the conclusions of atheism. Even as it needs no more than a worm to destroy the most beautiful plant, one false idea suffices for the destruction of the most beautiful system. Voltaire had thought that he was bound to take from Locke this insidious hypothesis—that "God could have given to matter the faculty of thinking;" and it is this hypothesis "which has frozen and rendered contemptible and halting, a theism to which he was led by the clearness of his good sense, by his poetical genius, by the prodigious activity of his soul, and by humane leanings." \*

\* *Lacretelle.*

In his latest writings he moderates his tone with regard to the greater number of the objections to which, previously, if he did not make good replies, he had at least attempted to reply. Thus, in his *Principle of Action*,\* he decides upon teaching the eternity of action in matter, which he denied in 1734, and which leads directly to pantheism. "The principle of nature being necessary and eternal," he says, "and its essential attribute being to act, it has therefore acted always, for had it not always been the acting God, it would have been always the indolent God, the God of Epicurus, the God who is good for nothing. . . . The world, which is His work, under whatever form, is therefore eternal as He is."

Here we see God put on the same footing with the physical forces, which, in fact, from the moment that they exist, act, and cannot but act. But from our not seeing why God should have acted in one certain time rather than in another, does it follow that we must admit His having acted from all eternity? We cannot do so except by renouncing the idea of a God distinct from matter.

Nevertheless, shortly before this,† Voltaire had continued to defend the theism of Bayle against the pantheism of Spinoza. "Bayle," he said, "easily discovered the weak part of this enchanted castle. He sees that, in fact, Spinoza makes his God to be composed of parts, although he is reduced to the necessity of retracting what he had said, affrighted at his own system. He sees what folly it is to make God a star and a pumpkin, . . . beating and beaten. He sees that this fable is below that of Proteus." Admirable; but still something must be found to put into its place, for without this, one is infallibly brought back to it.

"The will of his Sacred Majesty Chance, be done!" he

\* 1772.

† In 1766, in the *Philosophe Ignorant*—(The Ignorant Philosopher).

wrote to the King of Prussia, in 1773. It was one way more of paying his court to that prince, whose atheism he had previously combated, particularly in 1737, in a dissertation on fatalism. But behold them thenceforth quite of one mind. The king repeats Voltaire's jests, Voltaire the king's arguments. There is something profoundly sad in hearing two old men repeating to each other, with a grin, the final conclusion of that age—acting, in some sort, as spies upon each other, from the dread of one of them proving false to the religion of annihilation, and creeping towards the grave with an effort to convince themselves more and more fully that there is nothing beyond it.

V.—Here we see what Voltaire calls being chaplain to the King of Prussia, and this is what he preaches also with a most emphatic urgency in his numerous letters to Madame du Deffand, who was unbeliever enough to be pleased with his ideas, but wavering enough in her unbelief to make it advisable that she should have them often recalled to her. She sometimes spoke of death; she was afraid of it, and was even a little afraid of what might follow after. She therefore consulted Voltaire; and mark his reply: "You ask me what I think, Madam. I think, then, that there are but a small number of mortals who dare to have common sense; I think that you belong to that small number. But what purpose does that serve? None whatever. I exhort you to enjoy, as much as you can, life, which is a small matter, without fearing death, which is nothing."\* When she proposes the question in rather serious terms, Voltaire eludes it, and laughs. "I have advised you to live solely in such a manner as to enrage those who pay you annuities. As for me, it is

\* 1759.

almost the only gratification that remains to me. I figure to myself, from the moment that I feel the approaches of an indigestion, what two or three princes will inherit from me ; then I take courage from pure malice, and conspire against them with rhubarb and sobriety.”\* In another place he says : “ I make life a plaything, Madam ; it is fit for nothing else.... I write to you rarely, for I have never anything new to send you ; and after having often repeated that life is a child which must be rocked in a cradle till it falls asleep, I shall have said all that I know.”† Elsewhere, again : “ I believe, having fully reflected on the matter, that we ought never to think of death. The thought can only poison life... Death is nothing at all... The people who announce it ceremoniously, are the enemies of the human race ; they ought to be forbidden from ever coming near us.”† In fine, as she had insisted : “ As for death, let us reason a little, I pray you. It resembles sleep as much as two drops of water resemble each other. It is not the idea of our never awaking again that pains us ; it is the lugubrious pomp of death that makes it horrible ; it is the cruelty people show in warning us that for us all is at an end. Where is the use of coming to pronounce our sentence to us ? It is sometimes said of a man, ‘ He died like a dog ;’ but a dog is truly a happy being in having to die without all that ceremonial with which we are persecuted at the last moment of our life.”‡ He is fond of returning to this last idea. One of the things he envies in the King of Prussia, is that no one will dare, in his last moments, to speak to him about religion, and that he can promise himself, in consequence, this happy and peaceable death of a dog.

VI.—How, then, did he himself die, after these doleful

\* 1754.

† 1761.

‡ 1764.

sermons—he who had done so much to give himself, in default of Christian calm, that of a belief in annihilation?

Some will have it he died laughing; others, in inexpressible terrors. A few years ago, a celebrated preacher represented him as rolling on the ground, and imploring, with frightful sobs, not only God and Jesus Christ, but the Virgin and the saints. The same priest added, that God had repulsed him with horror. This appears far from Christian. One is not expected to love Voltaire; one is not allowed to set limits to the mercy of God.

Let us set aside fables. The truth is as follows. It is to be found in a recently published letter from Tronchin to Bonnet.

“Did my principles,” writes Voltaire’s physician,\* “require that I should tie them more tightly, the man whom I have seen sink, agonize, and die under my eyes, would have made a Gordian knot of them; and on comparing the death of the righteous, which is but the close of a fine day, with that of Voltaire, I would have very sensibly perceived the difference between a fine day and a tempest.... This man, then, was predestinated to die in my hands. I had always spoken the truth to him, and, unhappily for him, I had been the only one that did so. ‘Yes, my friend,’ he would often say, ‘there is none but you that has given me good counsels. Had I followed them, I should not have been in the frightful state I now am in. I should have gone back to Ferney; I should not have intoxicated myself with the smoke which has turned my head. Yes, I have been swallowing nothing but smoke; you now can do me no good. Send me the physician for the mad; I am mad.’... He was to go away two days after the follies of his crowning at the *Comédie Française*; but he received a deputation from the

\* 20th June 1778.



Academy which conjured him to honour it with his presence before his departure. He repaired to it, and there, by acclamation, he was made director of the company. He accepted the directorship, which lasts for three months.... From that moment until his death, his days were nothing but a hurricane of insanity. He was ashamed of it; when he saw me, he begged my pardon for it. He besought me to pity him, not to forsake him, especially as he had fresh efforts to make in order to engage the Academy to set about a dictionary after the model of the *della Crusca*. This dictionary was his last dominant idea, his last passion. He had himself undertaken the letter A, and had distributed the other letters among twenty-three academicians, some of whom, having engaged in the work with a bad grace, had singularly irritated him. 'These are lazy fellows,' he would say, 'but I will make them march fast enough;' and it was in order to make them march that, in the interval betwixt two sittings, he took so many drugs, and did all the mad things that threw him into the most frightful state of despair and insanity. I cannot recall it without horror. As soon as he saw that all that he had done to augment his strength, had only produced the contrary effect, death was ever before his eyes. From that moment frenzy possessed his soul. Recollect the Furies of Orestes : *Furiis agitatus obiit.*"

Voltaire, accordingly, did not die either laughing, as he had advised others, or in terror at the prospect of what he was to find beyond the tomb. Why suppose in him either more impudence or more fright than he really showed? Is not his death, as Tronchin has depicted it, an eloquent enough comment on his life?

No, he did not precisely tremble at the future that awaited his soul. But what a void around that deathbed! What a bitter feeling of solitude and desolation! Not a friend that

was not there, far less to soothe his last hour, than to see what sort of figure he would make ; not one of those peaceful recollections which piously rise to the heart of the righteous, friends unseen whose convoy accompanies him, chaste gleams that shed light on his last moments on earth. The man of Ferney died in the whirlwind in which he had lived. He would fain have snatched himself out of it for a moment, but he could not. He had led the grand round ; it led him in its turn. His writings, his glory—smoke ! Seventy years of labour—smoke ! He says it, he feels it, but just enough for the idea to prey upon him, without his contriving to spare a day, no, not an hour, for him to agonize at his ease. In vain did he write on hearing of some final success of his zeal : “ I die happy ; ” Tronchin is there to portray for us this affected bliss. And it is only while shuddering that he does so.

But this death did not frighten his friends ; at the most they saw in it a martyr to the glory of the faith of which he had been an apostle. Was it not fitting that the chaplain of the King of Prussia should die on the field of honour ? On his being gone, the place was not to be vacant. It was now D’Alembert who was to entertain the king with those consoling thoughts, and, failing D’Alembert, Frederick had only to choose from among all those who, like himself, had advanced with the age.

VII.—All, in fact—all those who had not at first declared for atheism—we see preserving faith in God, as their patriarch did, only *cum beneficio inventarii*, embarrassed, as he had been, with the universe, and experiencing no alarm at the thought of being at last atheists out and out. God will not have Himself to be an idea ; when not an object longed for, He departs. Now, people had accustomed themselves to be without him ; it was thought the triumph of science to explain,

without Him, the universe, and man, and everything. Some left Him openly out of account; others admitted Him into the circle of their ideas, but only to give Him nothing to do.

What place has He in fact with Montesquieu, with Buffon, and even with the man who most affected to cleave to the idea of a God—with Rousseau?

With Montesquieu it is mere surface-work. It has been said that he is polite to God, and this is all that can be said. God, in the *Spirit of Laws*, is like one of those personages whom a man respects precisely to the extent of not telling them to their face that he has no occasion for them.

With Buffon we have again mere surface-work, an affair of ornamentation and style. The idea is for him a fine idea, nothing else. He requires it as an author, and he keeps it; as a man, you are sensible that he would renounce it without any uneasiness. He is at bottom like M. de La Place the astronomer, who was asked one day why he never mentioned God in his treatises, and who frankly replied: "I could dispense with that hypothesis." A modern critic\* has thought that he could admire in Buffon "that august manner of withdrawing the inner throne of the Divine majesty," in order that man might not exaggerate its outer precincts. In fact, we do show respect by not supposing ourselves at every turn to be on the track of God's designs; but was this really his object? He seems too often to place God on such an elevation, merely in order to have him relegated to the utmost possible distance, as a king who should be exiled, under a load of honours, to the most distant extremity of his kingdom. A wit, but a pious one, used to say: "I love *God*, but I don't love the *Supreme Being*." He had observed, what is true, that the sole employment of this somewhat vague word is generally the indication of a weak faith and a tendency to unbelief.

\* M. Nisard.

Rousseau had, without doubt, a certain felt need of God; but this was confined to his imagination, and had nothing to do with his heart and mind. A professed worshipper of virtue, there was no virtue in his life; a professed worshipper of God, God is left out of his system. Between Rousseau preaching virtue as he preaches it, and Helvetius affirming that "remorse is but the foresight of the physical pains to which crime exposes us,"\* there is in fact much less difference than there appears. In the *Emile*, Rousseau has thrown in some fine passages on God. Take them away, and can you say that there is a void? It is one of his principles even that God should not be spoken of to children; and this sad principle he holds so tenaciously, as to announce it in spite of one of the most palpable contradictions into which he could have fallen. How could he suppose it possible that this child, so miraculously clever in seeing everything and sounding everything, could reach his fifteenth year without having ever asked, what so many ordinary children ask,—Who has made the world? where do people go to when they die? So that one would not only need not to speak to him about God, but to elude all his questions on that subject, and to keep off all the ideas that are likely to suggest them. This is, in fact, what Rousseau prescribes. In his political writings, where is God? You start from the savage state, where He is not to be found; you go on till you come to the deification of the people, where He is as little to be found. What is there, in short, that an atheist would require to take away from the practical side of Rousseau's theories in order to bring them to his own views?—Nothing!

\* *De l'Homme et de son Education*, Livre ii.—(Of Man and his Education), Book ii.

## CHAPTER XXX.

- I.—Materialism everywhere—Condillac and Buffon—The man-nose—Boulanger—Grimm.
- II.—The earthquake at Lisbon—People lose what little faith they still had in God—Voltaire a pessimist—His confidential communications to Thiriot—The pastor Vernes.
- III.—Montesquieu again—His theory of the influence of climates—Exaggerations—Errors—Protestantism in the North, and Roman Catholicism in the South—The religion for the eyes and ears.
- IV.—Voltaire sometimes distinguished Christianity from, sometimes confounded it with, what has been added to it—He refutes Naigeon—He repeats him—Jesus Christ in the *Philosophical Dictionary*.
- V.—How disadvantageously situate Roman Catholicism is for the contest with infidels—With a change in the modes of attack, there should be a change in the defence—Some advances—Guénée.—VI.—Voltaire's ignorance and dishonesty—Shells—He is opposed even to Buffon—How he acquired the reputation of a *savant*—His *Elements of Newton's Philosophy*—Maupertuis.
- VII.—What was mainly sought in Newton's philosophy—Divorce between religion and science—Every improvement became a victory for infidelity.

LET us return, then, to what we have been saying: Differences of form must not be allowed to keep essential identities out of view.

It was with sincerity, on the whole, that Voltaire thought himself more of a spiritualist than La Mettrie, Rousseau more of a spiritualist than Voltaire; it was with sincerity that Buffon reproached Condillac with having spoiled his statue. To Buffon, in fact, belonged the ingenious idea of studying sensation in a statue which should successively receive the five senses; but, always grandiose in his conceptions, he had

made it the first movement on the part of his statue to stretch out its hand in order to lay hold of the sun. Condillac gives to it first the sense of smelling; his man starts from the nose, with being a nose. People laughed, of course; and Buffon is indignant at his fine conception being so grossly materialized. But eye or nose, what did it matter? A sense is a sense, and he who says sense says matter. Buffon was sensualist; so was Condillac. Buffon had elegance and taste on his side, and Condillac had neither. That was all.

Thus there was a rivalry as to which should best refer all the manifestations of the human intellect to the senses and to matter. This tendency was further visible in the manner in which historical, legislative, and political questions were generally handled. The material side was ever placed foremost; principles followed afterwards if they followed at all. Was the punishment of death in question? *A hanged man is good for nothing.* Instead of killing malefactors, make them work. Was the question about convents and celibacy? "The country that peoples itself the fastest, although the poorest, is infallibly the best governed."\* Was it the revocation of the Edict of Nantes that was to be censured? It lost France many industrious and wealthy subjects. Had an assault to be made on the popedom? It carried large sums annually out of the kingdom. Ever the utilitarian argument—good at times, but which ought only to have held the second or the third rank, yet is paraded in the first. Was explanation, not discussion, called for? Then the most material was ever deemed the most profound. Even when it was impossible to believe in it, still it was regarded as an effort—unfortunate perhaps, but beautiful and great—which could not be too much encouraged. See what was said by Grimm, in 1766, of a book which had indefinitely thrown back the bounds of

\* *Emile*, Book v.

this miserable science—the *Antiquity Unveiled* of Boulanger. “The author maintains that all the religious ideas of the nations that are scattered over the globe may be traced to the physical calamities and catastrophes, the terror and tradition of which have been perpetuated from generation to generation. *This view is grand and philosophical.*” Grimm’s only fault with Boulanger is, his having systematized a little too much; but on the whole, he is so much pleased with his view, that he would like to see it applied to the history of poetry. It would, according to him, be easy to show “how poetical inspiration, as well as religious, must have had its source in the physical catastrophes that have taken place in our planet, and how, as these have become more remote, it has become weaker and weaker; so that the Greeks had less of it than the ancient Asiatic nations, the Romans less than the Greeks, while hardly any trace of it remains among modern nations.” Certain it is that this last trait could hardly be contested in 1766.

II.—But the system had received, six years before, a sort of confirmation, in the frightful commotion caused in people’s minds at the news of the disasters of Portugal.

In the midst of those endless nothings on which an inactive society was content to feed, suddenly there came word that a large city was no more, that twenty thousand of the inhabitants of Lisbon had been instantaneously overwhelmed under the ruins of their houses. Terror was at its utmost height; the walls seemed already to tremble. There was no more laughter; people would not so much as venture to talk loud, as if afraid that any violent movement in the air might communicate itself to the ground.

But what was to come out of it? What torch was to be kindled at those subterranean fires which had overthrown

Lisbon, and which all Europe thought it felt under its feet? Was it that of poesy? No. That of faith? Still less.

That catastrophe seemed, in fact, rather to consummate the rupture between the age and religion. The little trust people still had in God was lost; for they were too weak to think that He, who slew at once so many thousand human beings, could still be good and wise. As if the number before God was anything! As if He had not eternity wherewith to indemnify those whom He seemed to wrong by removing them out of this world! As if death, in fine, could logically be considered as an evil! All this, one would think, it would have been very easy to urge in reply; and one is astonished not to find these reasons a little more plainly stated in the letter—otherwise so finely written—which Rousseau sent to Voltaire on the subject.

For Voltaire, the grand echo, had greedily caught up those unbelieving whispers; he had made a poem of them, in which some kind critics have noted certain passages that are almost pious, as if it were not clear that those passages are there for the purpose of obtaining currency for the rest. This poem opens, in some sort, the second half of Voltaire's infidel career, that in which we see him gradually divest himself of those noble instincts which he had hitherto maintained, in spite of his principles, up to a certain elevation. Optimist with Pope in his *Essays on Man*, imitated from the English poet, he decidedly reaches that sarcastic pessimism to which he had hitherto descended only by fits and starts.

If we could have any doubts as to the real meaning of that piece, we should have only to see what its author said of it in a whisper to his friends. "If you like, honest and decent verses," he writes to Thiriot, "here are such as will close the sermon on Lisbon. Send them out to appease the Cerberuses." Elsewhere, while telling him to distribute some copies: "Our



friends will sufficiently understand me ; they will see that I could not have expressed myself otherwise." Again, in a letter to D'Argental : " My sermon on Lisbon has been made only to edify your flock, and I do not cast the bread of life to dogs." Always the dogs !

Among those dogs who persisted in believing in God, notwithstanding the disaster that befell Lisbon, and who, on the contrary, always felt more and more need of faith in Him, was the Genevese Vernes, whom Voltaire had not yet begun to revile. " It is said," Voltaire writes to him accordingly, " that you have preached an admirable discourse on the calamity at Lisbon, and that one could not have wished the city to be saved, your discourse seemed so very fine. You have further Mequinez and some hundred thousand Arabs that have been swallowed up. This may marvellously serve your Christian eloquence, all the more as those poor devils were infidels." As for him, he is too humane ; he pushes his sensibility so far as even to say : \* " I dare no longer complain of my colics since that accident ;" and it was on his part, in fact, a supernatural effort. But he was not the less for that mistaken when he supposed that Vernes would feel more at ease in portraying the ravages of the disaster among the Mahometans. It is chiefly to Christians that Christian eloquence desires to speak of God's judgments, because the more God shall have struck whom, it would seem, He behoved rather to spare, the more evident it will be that neither His justice nor His goodness say their last word in this world.

III.—The idea of those frigid exaggerations of Boulanger as to the part that physical catastrophes had played in the creation of religions, had further been suggested by Montesquieu, in his strange system on the influence of climates.

\* Letter to D'Argental.

Montesquieu has been so often criticized and so completely abandoned on this point by the greater number even of his admirers, that it is quite superfluous to refute him. "The theory of climate is for him a sort of false key, with which he picks the locks of all the problems in history."\*

In fact, it is not only religions in general that he pretends to explain by climates—he moreover attributes to the same causes, the history of their internal transformations; and the clearest facts, if they embarrass him, are sacrificed without more ado to his misty data.

The history of the Reformation, for example, is in his eyes wholly comprised in the diversity of characters impressed on the nations by the North and the South. "When the Christian religion underwent, two centuries ago, that unhappy disruption which divided it into Catholic and Protestant, the nations of the North embraced the Protestant, while those of the South retained the Catholic. This was because the nations of the North have, and always will have, a spirit of independence and of freedom which those of the South have not, and a religion without any visible head suits better the independence of the climate than that which has one."†

This would, of a surety, have mightily surprised Luther, Calvin, and all who associated themselves with their great work. Don't we seem to see them questioning themselves, and saying, "How now! It is because we are not Italians or Spaniards that we don't see the pope in the Gospel! It is because we drink beer and not wine that we exclaim against indulgences and against the worship of the saints!" It may be doubted how far Montesquieu would have maintained to their faces what he has written on their tombs.

But, perhaps unconsciously, they subjected themselves to the law discovered by the French philosopher two centuries

\* Victor Hugo.

† *Spirit of Laws*, Book xxvi., chap. 4.

after their time. Let us look at the facts, and see how far they confirm it.

The facts tell us, that in no country was the yoke of the Church's sole chief borne more impatiently than in Italy; in none did the ideas of liberty and reformation find a fuller response in men's hearts.

The facts tell us, that the first sparks that fell in the South produced partial conflagrations that blazed up more rapidly there than did those in the North.

The facts tell us, in fine, that those conflagrations had to be extinguished in seas of blood, and that had not the suppression been prompt and desperate, the South had been perhaps in advance of the North.

How much inaccuracy, moreover, and how much deplorable sensualism in what Montesquieu added, in the following book, on the more or less attachment of Christians to their different Churches. "When," he says, "we can conjoin with the idea of a spiritual Supreme Being which forms the doctrine, some further sensible ideas that enter into the worship, this gives us a great attachment to religion. . . . The Catholics, accordingly, who have more of this sort of worship, are more invincibly attached to their religion than the Protestants are to theirs."

One might have asked him what account he made of those French Protestants who were exposed at that very moment to so many evils, and yet were so firm in their faith.

One might further have asked him how he could reconcile with that invincible attachment of the Catholics to their worship, the fact itself of the Reformation spreading through more than a third of Europe.

Had he historical grounds for his assertion, what an encouragement to formalism! What a gross absolution for all that has been done and for all that might yet be done, in religion,

for captivating souls by means of the senses! Not a word, be it observed, on the abuses with which this method is almost infallibly accompanied. The people love ceremonies; then let them have them. Would you have them cleave to religion? Lay hold of them, then, by the eyes. What real disdain in all this! What contempt for men! For—we know it too well—in that religion which becomes endeared to us, he says, by means of forms, he had no faith, he did not cleave to it. Thus, it is as if he had said, “Popularize it as you please; it will be neither more nor less worthless.” It is a last application of the system he held on laws, for all that he has taught comes back to this, that a law that is adapted to the nature of those for whom it has been made is, in virtue of that alone, a good law. Thus Christianity is good for those who think it good. For those who would have it spiritual, make it spiritual; for those who would have it material, let it be given them material.

IV.—It is in this sense probably that we must understand the approval bestowed by Voltaire on the Jesuits, in the question of the Chinese ceremonies.\* We know that they were condemned at Rome for having allowed their neophytes in China to retain certain pagan customs.

It is true, that Voltaire’s fondness for the Chinese, joined to the delight he felt in contradicting the pope, sufficiently accounts for this judgment of his. Next, he says that if the Jesuits in this case acted wrong as Christians, they did not, as Catholics, deserve any very severe censure, seeing that Catholicism in Europe was modelled in so many things on the Roman paganism.

Thus he knew, at need, how to distinguish between Ca-

\* *Age of Louis XIV.*, ch. xxxix.

tholicism and Christianity; but he knew still better, when his polemics exacted it of him, how to confound them.

"This," said the atheist Naigeon, in his *Militaire Philosophie*,\* "is the opinion I have formed, after mature reflection, on the Christian religion. I think it absurd, extravagant, insulting to God, pernicious to men. . . . I look upon it as an inexhaustible source of murders, crimes, and atrocities committed in its name. It seems to me a torch of discord, of hatreds, of vengeance. . . . I see in it the buckler of tyranny against the peoples it oppresses, and the scourge of good princes when they are not superstitious. . . . Besides the right of abandoning it, I am under the strictest obligation to renounce it and to hold it in horror."

To this sally, in which we see infidelity swell into fanaticism: "We have here," replies Voltaire, "what is true when urged against the abuses of the Christian religion, but what is not true when urged against Jesus Christ, who has enjoined quite the contrary. Had people kept to the mind of Jesus, Christianity would have been always in peace."

Excellent; but mark now what he was to write a year afterwards in his short treatise on *Perpetual Peace*: "It is evident that the Christian religion is a net in which rogues have been catching fools for more than seventeen centuries, a poignard with which fanatics have been stabbing their brethren for more than fourteen."

He is fond of reverting—and we cannot blame him for it—to the persecutions that have tarnished the Christian Church; but never shall we find him plainly and conscientiously say what he considers to have been their source. At times he seems to hold Christians accountable for them while he absolves Christianity; at times he traces them not only to Christianity but to Jesus Christ Himself, quoting,† for ex-

\* 1768.

† In his twenty-sixth *Entretien*.

ample, as *atrocious*, those harmless words of the parable : "Compel them to come in ;" or, again, those assuredly not less harmless ones, looking at the passage in which they occur : "If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be as a heathen man." \*

In the *Philosophical Dictionary*, he on one occasion places Jesus Christ above the sages of antiquity, † but in doing so makes Him say that He made no pretence to found a religion, and commences from that an attack on all the doctrines of Christianity.

He imagines himself transported into a mysterious region, where are seen, piled up in heaps, the bones of all that have been immolated on account of religion, from the commencement of the world and especially of Christianity. These frightful heaps are intermingled with groves in which the sages that had inculcated love to men, Numa, Pythagoras, Zoroaster, and Socrates, walk about mournfully : "I went forward," says Voltaire, "into a thicket, situate above the groves, where all those sages of antiquity seemed to taste a sweet repose.

"I beheld a man of a gentle and simple aspect, and apparently about thirty-five years of age. He turned his eyes with an expression of pity to the distant heaps of whitened bones, through which I had been made to pass in order to reach the abode of the sages. I was astonished to find his feet swollen and bloody, his hands the same, his side pierced, his ribs flayed with stripes. 'Ah ! good God !' I said to him, 'is it possible that a just man, a sage, should be in this condition ? I have seen one of them who has been treated in a very odious manner ; but there is no comparison between his punishment and yours. Wicked priests and unjust judges

\* Mat. xviii. 17.

† Article *Religion*.

poisoned him ; was it by priests also, and by judges, that you were so cruelly murdered ?’

“ He answered, ‘ Yes,’ with much gentleness.

“ ‘ And who, then, were those monsters ?’

“ ‘ They were hypocrites.’

“ ‘ Ah ! that is saying everything. You had proved to them, then, like Socrates, that the moon was not a goddess, and that Mercury was not a god ?’

“ ‘ No.’

“ ‘ You wanted, then, to teach them a new religion ?’

“ ‘ Not at all. All that I said to them was this : Love God with all your heart, and your neighbour as yourselves.’ ”

Voltaire then makes Him condemn persecutions, but always in this untenable point of view—that Christianity is a system of morals, and nothing more. The excesses of Christianity, in short, are condemned only by abandoning Christianity itself.

V.—This important distinction which the enemies of Christianity knew not how to make, did not wish to make, others could not make, and this is one of the reasons that account for the resistance to infidelity being so feeble and uncertain in France, even on the part of pious persons. A Roman Catholic cannot place himself fairly on the territory of evangelical Christianity. He is obliged to defend, along with Christianity, all his Church’s additions to it ; he could not, at least without disowning that Church herself, disown those abuses of which infidels took advantage, for she has at various times sanctioned them all. How say to Voltaire, that in the words, *Compel them to come in*, there is nothing atrocious when one is obliged to respect all those decrees of councils and of popes which have given them an atrocious meaning, and made them the watchword of the most frightful cruelties ? Were they not applied, even at that time, in the most rigorous

sense, to a whole class of Frenchmen? What answer could be given to Voltaire when he saw a frightful despotism in that other Gospel saying which we have quoted? Had not the Church presented it as one of the foundations of her authority and of her infallibility? Could she permit those words to be brought back to their real primitive meaning—that being the only meaning to which Voltaire could have found nothing to object? It is no easy matter to have to maintain, at the same time, the existence of God and the authority of the Pope, the soul's immortality and transubstantiation.\* Romanism, in the presence of infidelity, is a soldier surcharged with baggage, and with baggage which he is not allowed to throw off in the fight; it is an army which cannot abandon bad positions in order to concentrate and fortify itself in such as are good. See, as we have already remarked, under a different point of view, how Protestant apologetics have ever been better than Romanist. In Voltaire's time, the successors of the minister Abbadie were hanged in France, but his book was reprinted.†

It is true that this same book, though regarded in the seventeenth century as the best buckler that could be opposed to the assaults of infidels, was inadequate to the needs of the eighteenth. To a new system of tactics, a new art of defence had to be opposed—a faith more in harmony, in its forms, with the attitude of the time. Religion in France was like some old city which had to defend itself with loop-holed walls, against a park of artillery. Many a check was necessary before people could be made to perceive that they were making a bad defence. It was only in 1771, seven years

\* One of Voltaire's adversaries, the Abbé Pluquet, author of an apology for the execution of John Huss, had taken it into his head to explain the Real Presence. According to him, the body of Jesus Christ was and remained one; but circulated invisibly with such rapidity, that its existence in several places was for us simultaneous.

† His *Treatise on the Christian Religion*.



before the death of Voltaire, that Guenée, educated in the English school, published his *Letters to certain Jews*, the only apologetic work of that time by which Voltaire felt himself hit; still Voltaire paid no serious attention to it until 1776, when the second part of the work appeared. "The Jewish secretary," he wrote to D'Alembert, "is not wanting in wit and intelligence. But he is as mischievous as a monkey; he bites so as to draw blood, while professing to kiss your hand. He shall be bitten in turn." Yet Guenée was far from being a very powerful writer. Voltaire's embarrassment and the feebleness of his reply,\* sufficiently demonstrate what would have been gained by drawing him on into ground where he owed all his strength to the ignorance of others.

VI.—What absurdities had he not uttered! How many facts acquired by science had he not obstinately rejected, however little they may have seemed to him to agree with the statements of the Bible! The deluge, in particular, was his grand bugbear. He could not, he would not admit that the earth had ever been covered with water either since or before the appearance of man. He would have it that the shells found in the passages of the Alps had been lost by pilgrims repairing to Rome during the Middle Ages. Long after this luminous explanation we find him laughing a little at himself, but he returns on all occasions to these unlucky shells; and if he abandons the idea of their having been brought by pilgrims, he will have them to have been the shells of oysters eaten by travellers. "I have seen," we find him say,† "some oyster-shells petrified at a hundred leagues from the sea. But I have seen also, under twenty feet of earth, pieces of Roman money, the rings of knights, at more than nine hundred miles

\* *Un Chrétien contre Six Juifs*—(A Christian against Six Jews).

† *La Défence de mon Oncle*—(The Defence of my Uncle). 1767.

from Rome ; and I did not say, These rings, those gold and silver pieces, were fabricated here. No more did I say, Those oysters were produced here. I said, Travellers have brought here the rings, and the money, and the oysters." In the same small work : "Be sure to keep in view," he adds, "this great truth, that nature never belies herself. All kinds remain ever the same. Animals, vegetables, minerals, metals, all is inva-riable in this prodigious variety. Everything preserves its own essence. It is of the essence of the earth to have moun-tains, without which it would have no rivers ; accordingly, it is impossible that the mountains should not be as old as the earth. It might as well be said that our bodies long existed without heads." Elsewhere, again :\* "Those pretended beds of shells that cover the mountains, the coral formed by insects, mountains raised by the sea, all this appears to me fit only for being printed at the end of the *Thousand and One Nights*." And in his *Essay on Manners* : "Some have been bold enough to aver," he had said, "that the whole globe has been burnt. These fancies dishonour physical science ; such quackery is unworthy of history." Thus, even in physics, he went farther than that apostle with whom he sometimes in jest compared himself. Thomas would not believe except what he saw ; Vol-taire refused to believe what people showed him written on the surface of the earth. Even Buffon's authority could not counterbalance, in his mind, the dread of being led to see one error less in the Bible. They were very nearly falling out with each other in good earnest. Buffon laughed at Voltaire's oysters and pilgrims ; Voltaire tried to laugh at Buffon's style, and one day that somebody had quoted his *Natural History*, "Not so natural," said he. But, in the end, Buffon having sent him a new edition of his works, Voltaire thanked him in a very amiable letter in which he spoke to him of his prede-

\* *Singularités de la Nature*—(Singularities of Nature).

cessor *Archimedes the first*; to which Buffon replied that people never would say, *Voltaire the second*. These compliments put an end to the quarrel. "I have no wish," said Voltaire, "to break with him on account of the shells." But he liked better to say nothing more about them than frankly to adopt Buffon's ideas.

By his endeavours to give popularity in France to the system of Newton, he had made for himself a reputation for science and universal accomplishment which many still continue to attribute to him, but which an examination of the facts would reduce to much smaller proportions. That he did France a great service by explaining Newton in lucid prose,\* and in fine verses, is evident;† this, however, was but the literary side of the question. As for the scientific side, let us not forget that Maupertuis, in 1724, preached Newton to the Academy of Sciences, and that it was he even who gave Voltaire a relish for his system; let us not forget that his *Discourse on the Figure of the Stars* preceded by six years the *Elements of Newton's Philosophy*, published by Voltaire in 1738. Voltaire had had, besides, in England, every facility for making himself thoroughly conversant with a system clear in itself, taught by all the scientific men of the country, and already understood by everybody. He had no need, therefore, to be a man of science himself in order to teach it—all the more as the first edition of the *Elements* was, by his own confession, full of errors,‡ and the work had to be revised by Maupertuis. Success, in fine, was easy. Fontenelle, without declaring himself a Newtonian, had greatly smoothed the way for it. Europe

\* A word wanting in clearness contributed, however, to retard in the public the success of the English theory. Voltaire had said that the moon weighs (*pèse*) on the earth, the earth on the sun, &c. This expression, though just, was so inconsistent with the ordinary idea of weight, that many looked upon it only as an absurdity.

† *Épître à Madame de Châtelet*, 1738—(Epistle to Madame de Chatelet, 1738).

‡ See a curious letter to Maupertuis, of 22d May 1738.

had for a long time been ready to bow before the genius of Newton, and there is nothing to prove that Voltaire hastened much the definitive reign of his system. At the same time that he gave an exposition of his doctrines in France, Algarotti published at Venice his *Newtonianism for the Ladies*.

VII.—But while the English philosopher had been not so much proud of having come to understand the universe, as happy to see in it more clearly the wisdom and the working of a God, one of the reasons, on the contrary, that made people enthusiasts for his system, was their seeing in it a means of banishing God from the universe, or, at least, of no longer troubling themselves about Him. How could this be? It is not easily explained; but the fact is not the less apparent in the course which we see from that time forward pursued by science. Because, thanks to Newton, the law had been discovered which explained everything in the physical world, people thought they might dispense in some sort with any further inquiry, with seeing anything beyond that law. “We now know it,” they seemed to say; “it matters little to us who made it. Our predecessors used to say, It is God that makes the stars move in their courses; but as for us, we shall say, It is attraction.” Had not Montesquieu said already, in 1721,\* “*This system, which so powerfully eases Providence*”? And here he spoke of the system of Descartes, which was so much more complicated. So much need was there felt for *easing* God—that is to say, for doing without Him!

Speaking scientifically, there was an advantage, it cannot be denied, in this separation between religion and science. It is certain that the name of God had often been employed to screen much ignorance and sloth. “God has thus willed it,” is not an explanation; it is a mere confession of im-

\* Discourse to the Academy of Bordeaux.

tence—a highly honourable confession if preceded by strenuous investigation, but quite unworthy of science when made a pretext for dispensing with study.

But if this separation be a divorce, if religion and science ought not to be united in any case, then science has lost its noblest crown. "Religion," says Bacon, "is the spice that keeps science from corrupting." In vain, besides, would science ask to be only separated; she inevitably becomes hostile. Queen of the universe, as her pride whispers to her she is, she is not satisfied until she has dethroned the king.

Such is the spectacle which she presented in the eighteenth century, both in the general character and in the details of her work.

In the general character; for science was universally considered as leading ultimately to nothing short of the negation of everything that was not part of herself.

In the details; for there was not a fact, however minute, to which she did not give a certain value and importance in the struggle. Not a grain of sand but was allowed to enter its complaint against Him who had made both the grain of sand and the worlds. On reading over all that Voltaire has written on Newton and his system, one feels, even in the better passages, that here there is a man infinitely less affected with the beauty of the substance than malignantly attentive to the consequences. What he sees, what he loves, in this immortal doctrine, is not so much a true system in physics as a novelty in philosophy, and an immense embarrassment in religion.

The same sentiment meets us in the favour with which his lessons were received. There was little enthusiasm for the substance—much curiosity as to the deductions to be drawn from it. People were not so much gratified at having discovered at last the system of the universe, as at being able to

fancy themselves armed anew against Christianity, against spiritualism in general.

Hence, among other signs of the times, the return of the ancient Greek custom of calling those who studied the natural sciences *philosophers*. This was no longer owing, as in former times, to a real confusion among the various branches of the human sciences; but philosophy and the sciences being considered as concurring inevitably towards the same end—the ruin of religion, the man of science was a *philosopher* as being the ally of the philosophers. Such he was declared to be, we say, by authority of Voltaire, though he might persist in declaring himself a believer.

Hence, further, the importance attached in the philosophical world to discoveries in which philosophy was much less interested than in the system of Newton, but which helped towards maintaining the struggle against the ideas and the things of the past. What debates, for instance, were occasioned by inoculation! What ardour on the part of some! what resistance on the part of others! On the one side, all the partisans of the new ideas; on the other, all the partisans of the old state of things, all the corporations that represented it, the faculty of medicine, the Sorbonne, parliament. The day that the Duke of Orleans sent his children to the Opera after being inoculated by Tronchin, and when the public greeted them with a frenzy of applause—that day, be assured, was a heavy blow to the monarchy, to religion, to all principles. There was not a step in advance, however excellent, that was not a victory on the side of the demolishers.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

- I.—What was opposed to the torrent—Despotism and weakness—The assailants honoured and their adversaries hooted—Would another king have fared better?—The decline had commenced under Louis XIV.—Where people stood, without knowing it, in 1715.
- II.—The censorship under Louis XIV.—Under Louis XV.—The censors—Their annoyances and their scruples—What questions were always threatening to rise—What progress they made.
- III.—Embarrassments and perplexities of authors—The censorship striking both friends and foes, but chiefly friends—To *deceive*, to *subdue*—The play-actors and the book-sellers likewise censors.
- IV.—No common principle of repression—The syndical chambers—The cities by which books could be imported—Tacit permits—*Colporteurs*—Expedients—Subterfuges—The keeper of the seals and Diderot.
- V.—Marmontel and his *Belisarius*—Tactics—The influence of women in the eighteenth century—*Belisarius* and the Parliament—*Belisarius* at Court—*Belisarius* at the Sorbonne—The fifteenth chapter—*Indiculus—ridiculus*—Voltaire managed the whole affair—The clergy become more and more inflexible—Turgot and the *thirty-seven verities*.
- VI.—Intolerance—Maintained by the clergy entire and without mercy—The manners of the day oppose the execution of the laws which the clergy cause to be made—An edict of 1757.

Thus, from day to day, did the invading host augment its forces; thus were all the posts which it took a fancy to possess, successively abandoned or carried by assault.

To this torrent what was there, in fact, opposed? Books utterly worthless; episcopal *mandements*, the best of which—always speaking in the name of authority, of the Church—necessarily missed fire; and well it was, moreover, when no

mercenary pen was discovered in them—the pen of a wit, perhaps of an infidel. Violent measures were resorted to, but seldom opportunely; a thousand precautions were taken, but they were illusory, and only gave to the poisons they were meant to proscribe, the attractiveness of forbidden fruit.

Next, side by side with the official despotism which lowered itself, and seemed to beg pardon for its acts, that of public opinion went on gaining always in boldness and magnitude. It was not only by songs or by anonymous pamphlets that the philosophical public revenged itself on the annoyances it received from the Government; reprisals were made all the more openly the more the repression had been timid and irresolute. As the author of an impious book, you might have been condemned by the Parliament without the slightest stain on your honour; as a magistrate, you would have had a mark of infamy put on you for having dared to condemn that same book. In 1770, the Academy of Marseilles publicly announced that it would send no compliments to M. Segurier, the advocate-general, who happened to be residing for a short time there, although this was a usual mark of respect paid to every member of the French Academy. He had denounced, at Paris, some of the writings of the day; this was enough to make a provincial city, although far less *philosophized* than Paris, think it a piece of good manners to refuse him the usual homage. All eulogiums were to be reserved for those who had betrayed their duty by tolerating or by favouring the books that M. Segurier had been so bold as to proscribe. Three months after the affront done to him by a provincial academy, a noisy ovation was to greet, at a public meeting of the French Academy, the magistrate who had sheltered under his venerated name so many anarchical audacities—Malesherbes.

We have seen, in our own days, ovations still more scandalous, reprisals still more blind; but these cannot give us an



idea of the immense bearing that such facts must then have had. In an absolute government all is of a piece; it is a vault in which you cannot displace a stone without unsettling all the rest. The smallest affront given to one of the representatives of the Government, was a blow levelled at the foundations of the throne.

Could any better resistance have been offered with the then existing elements? Would a king with more of the king in him than Louis XV. had, have been more fortunate?

This question, which has often been put, is incorrect. It assumes, in general, that Louis XV. found the dykes that kept out the flood entire, and that he allowed them to be swept away. Now, he found them swept away; they had been so, in fact, under Louis XIV., and even long before his death. A man of the name of Bois-Guillebert, a lieutenant in the bailiwick of Rouen, wrote a book about the year 1695, in which he set himself to prove that all had given way since 1660. People thought it the work of a fool, but more lately, ideas have been found in it of an astonishing soundness. Bois-Guillebert had come to see that Louis XIV. had only organized the country's decline.

What did there remain, in 1715, of that which constitutes the moral force of a country? Authority, too much incarnated in one man, was doomed to die along with him. Piety, which had taken refuge in forms, was to end in forms. Ninon de l'Enclos made more infidels in her old age than Madame de Maintenon could make saints. Many facts have proved to have had more distant bearings than was imagined at the time. The *Provincials*, the *Tartuffe*, the protection accorded to that piece by Louis XIV. had, after a long interval, made a huge opening for many things which neither the king nor Molière nor Pascal could have foreseen. La Rochefoucauld, in his *Maxims*, had laid the foundation of the *Esprit* of Helve-

tius. Gassendi had opened the way for Locke, Condillac, and many others; for without dreaming of evil, he had been the apostle of sensation. Epicurism had had some brilliant adepts, literary men or princes—Saint-Evremond, Chaulieu, La Fare, the Contis, the Vendômes, perhaps even the great Condé—we mean no offence to Bossuet—the Duke of Chartres, in fine, who was to become the Regent. Manners had little need to change in order to their becoming openly what they had hardly ever ceased to be—bad. So much licentiousness had been permitted at the theatre, for the sake of diverting people's minds from the public calamities of the time, that it became necessary for the Regency to issue orders for the purification of the play-book, people of any character being unable any longer to bear witnessing such plays. Serious literature had exhausted the fertile but narrow territory which it had chalked out for itself at the foot of the throne. What king, what god rather, must have filled the throne, in order to that literature's continuing to keep its ground under his sceptre, and to draw inspiration from his looks!

II.—Accordingly, it was not long before it began to chafe against the trammels to which it had long submitted without a murmur, without even perceiving that they were trammels; for, under Louis XIV., it had obeyed so well and so naturally that general spirit of order and of faith, that the censorship had hardly ever any occasion to bestir itself. Scarcely do we perceive it trouble, at wide intervals, some unknown author who hastens to submit, and that without even complaining; the good and the illustrious seem never to have dreamt of its interference, for they had no effort to make, no constraint to impose on themselves in order to their writing nothing that could awaken the susceptibilities of the Government.

Under Louis XV., on the contrary, hardly any but authors

of the lowest order were on good terms with the authorities; they were the leading men in literature that had perpetually some quarrel to void with the royal censors.

These functionaries—the official guardians of morality and of monarchical traditions—were already so hard to be found, that Government had much ado to fill up their places. Literary men of high reputation did not care to discharge such functions, and besides, one could scarcely think—we have seen for what reasons—of intrusting them to such men. Obscure authors had to be appointed, under however keen a sense of the ridiculousness of constituting them the sovereigns of a domain where, in point of talent, they ranked as the lowest subjects. This sovereignty brought them tolerably good appointments, which nevertheless were but a poor compensation for the epigrams, the abuse, the annoyances of every kind to which they were daily exposed. Few of them, in fine, had been so prudent as that their own past doings did not form more or less an indictment against both their functions and themselves. In 1774, one of the theatrical censors was the younger Crebillon, the author of some obscene romances.

If a censor belonged, as an exception, to the highest rank in the republic of letters, he had the appearance of crushing, from a feeling of jealousy, those whom he already eclipsed by his talents. Often, too, no longer so free as a judge as he had been as an author, he thought himself obliged to condemn, among his brethren, what he himself might once have dared to do. Crebillon the elder had said, in his *Xercès*—

“Fear made the gods, audacity made kings.”

He had said, in his *Cromwell*—

“The servile prejudice of owing aught  
To kings, shows imbecility of thought.  
And he whose soul the name of king can blind,  
Should his desert in base obedience find.”

Yet he refused, in 1750, to authorize that verse in Saurin's *Aménophis*—

"The people, which of yore did choose your sirea."...

He was afraid of allowing men to be taught that kings were primitively the elected of the people, that they did not come down to them from heaven, or have not been mysteriously distinguished by nature, like queen-bees.

This inevitable question, besides, as to who were the first kings, was one of the grand embarrassments of all the stays of the monarchy. The people had heard it treated under the regency with a boldness indicating great imprudence in those who discussed it. The grand affair of legitimated princes had called forth memorials in which the authors on both sides went much farther than could at all have been wished; all concluding by a sort of appeal to the nation, recognised as the supreme arbiter. In these the royal power was set forth as a deposit and a mandate, and monarchy as the effect given to a contract between a family and the people. After the quarrel was made up, the legitimated and the legitimate found themselves equally willing to consign the whole to the darkness which they had momentarily removed; but the light returned to it in spite of them. Behind a primitive election, which they found it impossible not to admit, there was the sovereignty of the people, and how was it possible to banish that sovereignty for ever amid the mists of past ages? The attempt nevertheless was made, and Montesquieu had set the example. The Abbé Dubos having maintained\* that, among the Franks, there had been only one order of citizens, the author of the *Spirit of Laws* was not afraid to call this "a statement insulting to the blood of our first families and to

\* *Histoire de l'Etablissement de la Monarchie Française*—(History of the Establishment of the French Monarchy).

our three royal races." "The origin of their families," he goes on to say, "would not lose itself, then, in oblivion, night, and time! History, forsooth, is to throw light on ages when they would have been but common families!" Monsieur de Montesquieu, you showed yourself a little of the baron when you said this. Alas, did not Napoleon, who made kings, repeat at times with pleasure, that he had been born a gentleman?

But not the less did the question make its way into notice. At the consecration of Louis XV., the heralds had asked, according to ancient usage, if the French were pleased with the king that had been given them. At the consecration of Louis XVI., this formality was suppressed. It was beginning to be dangerous.

III.—Thus it was no easy matter to compose a book of any depth, or of any talent, that did not damage some of these frail foundations. "The censor's approval," said Helvetius, "is almost always a certificate of stupidity." One may conceive what it must have been, even for the least ardent and the best meaning, to lie under a constant dread of saying too much, or of saying something bad—to have to battle about ideas and about words. This verse, which I feel so happy to have hit upon, will perhaps have the pen drawn through it. This sentence, which has cost me such immense pains, will perhaps be cut through the middle. And this page, which I am so proud of, I may be compelled to change. This idea, which I am convinced is good, true, useful; that fact, which I know to be incontestable, I must take good care not to announce, for it alone would suffice to prevent my book from ever seeing the light. Like the *Figaro* of Beaumarchais, "Provided I say nothing in my writings about the government, or religion, or politics, or morals, or people in place, or

of corporate bodies of character, or of the Opera, or of any other playhouses, or of anybody who has any connexions, I may freely print anything under the inspection of two or three censors."

After the book was written, how many precautions were further required in order that the censorship should not see what was not in it, and perhaps condemn it for some imaginary resemblance between it and some other work that had been condemned! Cardinal Richelieu, it was said, required no more than four lines of a man's writing to find wherewithal to have him hanged. How should there ever be any difficulty in finding, within four pages of a book, a reason to prohibit its being printed? When the Government had to show any rigour towards formidable authors, it never failed, in order to secure its being forgiven for doing so, to be still more severe towards others, including those even who supported it. In 1762, when Fréron was blamed for the want of vigour in his *Journal*, he replied that everything was gnawed and mangled at the censorship. Bachaumont wrote, about the same time: "The printers complain that new things are beginning to be exhausted; an embargo has been laid on all manuscripts. The police passes nothing, tolerates no pleasantries." The Government know not how to use force without displaying weakness.

The severities of the censorship naturally multiplied with the growing maliciousness of the public, sharpened as that was in proportion to these severities. It often happened that a verse, a word, approved as inoffensive, came to bear an unlooked-for meaning, which no longer made it allowable. Thus in *Mahomet*:

"I must be help'd to cheat the universe,"

said the hero of the piece. But behold! at this word *cheat*, people laughed and clapped their hands ironically. It was

no longer Mahomet, it was the Jesuits, it was priests in general that they pretended they heard avowing their tactics. Next day, there came forth an order to the players to change the word *tromper* (to deceive, to cheat) into *dompter* (to vanquish); on which the public did not fail to call out, every time it occurred—" *Tromper ! tromper !* "

Often, too, the players changed, at their own instance, what seemed likely to provoke, when spoken on the stage, some storm that might compromise them. It was like another censorship, which also brought upon authors its own peculiar annoyances and disgusts. It was the same among the booksellers, persons who, as may well be imagined, had no desire to embroil themselves with the Government on account of writings in the glory of which they had no share. This, at the time of the publication of the *Encyclopédie*, was one of Diderot's great torments. "One day"—it is Madame de Vandeuil, his daughter, who speaks \*—"on looking for something in a volume which had just appeared, and of which he had revised all the proofs, he found an article pared down, stitched over again, and mutilated. He fancied it must be something wrong in the printing; but looks through the volume, and finds many other articles that had met with the same fate. It was Lebreton, the bookseller, whose alarms had led him to put out everything that appeared to him to be too strong. My father was almost made ill by it. Never did I hear him speak coolly on the subject of that unlucky volume. He seemed convinced that all that read it must see, as he did, what was wanting in each article; and the impossibility of repairing the damage put him out of humour twenty years after."

One can readily understand what impatience and bitterness such trammels must have produced, not only in Diderot, who

\* *Souvenirs*—(Recollections).

had always a little fever on him, but even in the wisest and the calmest.

IV.—All this, notwithstanding, prevented nothing.

What was wanting especially in the edicts and regulations relative to the press—in the bookselling department (*librairie*) as was said—was consistency. The net had small meshes, but it had also large holes in it which none knew how to close.

At Paris, the corporation of booksellers had a police of their own. Their *syndical chamber* was charged with the execution of that police's regulations—and, narrowly watched by the lieutenant-general of police, it tolerated no open infraction of them; but it had neither the means, nor in most cases had it the wish, to prevent indirect infractions.

Most of the provincial cities had neither syndical chamber nor censors. Books were printed in them without control, with the sole precaution, when prosecutions were dreaded, of putting on them the name of some Swiss or Dutch printer.

Books coming from abroad could enter France only through certain cities named by law. The custom-houses there sent them off under leaden seals, and special censors took cognisance of them. But those censors had very little to do. Smuggling, encouraged by enormous profits, undertook to introduce all that they ought to have been able to arrest.

When a work was neither so bold as that the Government could interdict it, nor yet so irreproachable as that it should seem proper for the censors to approve of it, the ministry sometimes granted tacit authorizations. Many books, besides, printed without permission, made their way into circulation; and as a law is really no law unless it takes its course with respect to everybody, prosecutions always wore an untoward aspect of caprice and injustice. What was put down in the



capital, was often tolerated in the provinces. In 1766, many volumes of the *Encyclopédie* were publicly printed at the gates of Paris, and the Government shut its eyes.

The hawkers had been subjected to severe regulations; but neither were these enforced except by fits and starts, and with a capriciousness that naturally became revolting. In 1768, a man called Josserand was condemned to the pillory, to being branded, and to nine years of the galleys, for having sold some volumes whose authors, though well known, were never molested.

Often, in fine, after the greatest efforts to discover an author, or printer, or the sellers, the attempt failed. Artifices were multiplied in proportion to the prosecutions. The *Gazette Ecclésiastique*, a Jansenist journal, was printed for some time in the interior of a huge pile of firewood.

One of the means most generally employed to elude the censorship, and in the event of prosecution to escape from the penalties to which authors were liable, was to declare that the author had written for himself alone, and that the manuscript had been stolen. This excuse was ordinarily admitted. One day that Diderot, on being summoned before the Keeper of the Seals, had repeated it with his usual assurance: "Well then, sir," said the magistrate, "I prohibit you from being robbed." It was on the occasion of that interview that the Prince of Condé said: "The Keeper of the Seals is very bold. He has ventured to appear before Diderot!" This saying well describes to what a point the philosophical school had obtained the mastery in France.

V.—When the author did not wish to launch into clandestine printing, what manœuvres and what artifices had he not to employ in order to obtain the indispensable approbation!

Let us fancy ourselves in 1766. Marmontel has finished

his *Belisarius*; the question is, How is he to publish it? The author—it is he who tells us the story so pleasantly in his *Memoirs*—had scarcely more to fear than the court in regard to political audacities, the Sorbonne in regard to religious audacities, and the Parliament in regard to everything.

But in the Parliament there is the Abbé Terray, a friend of the Encyclopædists, and a friend also of one Madame Gaulard, with whom Marmontel is acquainted. Marmontel goes to find him living with her in the country. He reads *Belisarius* to her, and the abbé, “though naturally far from being a man of sensibility (it is Marmontel who speaks), is present at the reading.” He is caught at once. He promises that the Parliament, which is at his command, will not meddle with the matter, even although the Sorbonne should think it its duty to do so. Here is the first point gained; for the Sorbonne begins to have little influence by itself, and its censures are laughed at when not followed up by the Parliament and the Bastile.

A second point was to obtain the privilege—an affair of the Chancellor's. The privilege was the formal authority to print, in the case of no opposition from the censors. But the chancellor at that moment happened to be Maupeou, a rough man, he who cashiered the Parliaments to punish them for having imagined themselves to be something in the political constitution of the State. The champion of absolute power, can he be asked to give his sanction to the printing of such a book? Is he to be asked? No; but to get some one to ask him is another thing, for he also has a female friend, and that friend is Madame Merlin—no other than the wife of Marmontel's bookseller. She makes the request, and obtains it.

What is there that we do not find women mixed up with in the history of that time! From Madame de Pompadour, or Madame du Barry, holding the sceptre, to the obscure mistress

of the mere councillor, they reign, they govern, they are everywhere, they do everything.

This evil, like many others, was of older date than people imagined. It was idle for Louis XIV. to say in a letter to his grandson, the King of Spain: "You will not allow your wife to govern you; you are too sensible of the dishonour that such weakness involves." That weakness was his own; and he surrendered himself to it all the more, the less he was conscious of it. Madame de Maintenon, who kept him in her leading-strings, has the simplicity to complain, in a letter to Villars, that women mix themselves up with everything. "Do you know, aunt," said the Duchess of Burgundy to her one day, in the presence of Louis XIV., "why the queens in England govern better than the kings? It is because, under the queens, it is the men who govern; whilst under the kings it is the women." Another woman, but one who never interfered in anything, the Duchess of Orleans, the regent's mother, has recorded in her *Memoirs*: "This kingdom, unhappily, has been too much governed by women, old and young. It is time that men were left to act for themselves." But it was not under Louis XV. that there could be a beginning made of this.

But at all times, the part played by women is an important element of appreciation. If they are allowed no influence at all, it is barbarism; if they are allowed too much, it infers decline, especially when no shame is felt in being indebted to them in matters quite out of their sphere.

In 1746, as soon as it was whispered that Madame d'Etiolles had caught the fancy of Louis XV., a young abbé, of a good family, begged to be allowed to present his respects to her. He was admitted. He was made to recite some verses to her. He was found an amusing, pleasant fellow. His protectress having become Madame de Pompadour, from thenceforth

charged herself with his fortunes. He considered himself honoured in owing everything to her; and everything he did owe to her, even to his cardinal's hat—for this little abbé, who wrote verses, and whom Voltaire baptized Baby-Shop-girl (*Babet-la-Boutiquière*), was the future Cardinal de Bernis.

In 1766, a priest wrote to Voltaire himself, begging him to ask Mademoiselle Clairon, the actress, to obtain for him through M. de Villepinte, her lover, a living in Bearn.

But let us return to Marmontel.

"It remained for me," says he, "to secure myself on the side of the court. I dreaded malignant allusions and applications—the accusation of having had some other king in my eye in the picture that I had given of a weak and deceived king. There was but too close an analogy betwixt the two reigns. The King of Prussia wrote to me: 'I have read the beginning of your *Belisarius*. You are very bold.' Others might say this; and had my enemies attacked me on that side, I would have been a lost man. There was no way, however, by which I might take any direct precautions in this respect. The slightest indication of disquietude on my part would have given the alarm, and led to my being denounced. Nobody would have incurred the responsibility of cheering me on, or of assisting me. I should have been told to toss my book into the fire, or to expunge all of it that was capable of being interpreted as allusions; and how much then must have been expunged!"

Thereupon, putting a bold face on the matter, he openly announced his intention of dedicating the work to the king.

This artifice was not his, but Voltaire's, who had set the example more than forty years before. While his friends trembled at the thought of seeing him return, on account of his having published the *Henriade*, behind those prison-bars that had witnessed his tracing its first lines, he himself asked

for leave to dedicate it to Louis XV. He was refused;\* but the intention remained not the less proved; and Voltaire expressed his astonishment, when people would have the poem thought wanting in orthodoxy, that any one should impute intentions not quite monarchical to a work which he had wished to dedicate to the king.

The same thing, or nearly so, had been done by Helvetius, the author of the book *De l'Esprit*. With the most perfect good feeling, he had respectfully offered the first copies to the king, to the queen, to the dauphin, to all the princes successively; then, as the storm that it had raised began to mutter, he affected not to be able to understand why. Would he have offered with his own hand to such pious personages a book that he could have believed to be impious and immoral?

Such then was the course taken by Marmontel for that poor *Belisarius*—a very dull work, assuredly, compared with the book written by Helvetius, but the audacities of which were much more patent. Helvetius, diffuse, entangled, had been approved at the censorship; it had even been the subject of some merriment among his friends to see that office fall into the trap; and as the censor, Tercier, was employed at the Foreign Office, people did not forget to say that *l'esprit* (wit) was a *foreign affair* to him, like those with which he was daily occupied. But *Belisarius* was clear—too clear, and could deceive none but those that shut their eyes.

The Count de Saint-Florentin, minister of the king's household, declared that his Majesty would certainly not accept the dedication. The author, who looked for nothing else, affected

\* His dedication—for he had prepared one—would of itself have sufficed for procuring this refusal. Among other bold things in it, he said: "The astonishment we feel when they sincerely love the public good, is a very disgraceful thing for kings." The pompous eulogiums he bestowed afterwards on Louis XV. had too much the appearance of being introduced merely as a passport to the rest.

great surprise and great distress ; but, said he, " I will not be dissatisfied. What, in fact, was my object ? To have a witness at court of the intention I had to dedicate the work to the king."

Armed at all points, he at last approaches the censorship.

The lay censor, Bret, gives his imprimatur. At the Sorbonne, the work is given for examination to a doctor of the name of Chevrier, a very mild man, who keeps it a week, returns it with high eulogiums, and refuses his approbation. Another—for the author had the right to choose from among the doctors of the Sorbonne—shows less scrupulosity. He approves, and the work is published forthwith.

But behold the whole Sorbonne in a buzz ! The doctors ask in alarm how any of them could have sanctioned such a book. What alarms them most—and they have the signal want of sense to proclaim it on the house-tops—is the fifteenth chapter, that in which Marmontel preaches toleration.

The author desired nothing better. It was like pointing out to him an impregnable fortress ; for people were now, as we have said, in the year 1766, and the cause of toleration had made, since the case of the Calases, great strides. Moreover, by exclaiming so much against that fifteenth chapter, public attention was withdrawn from all the rest—a circumstance which also gave the author great delight. " That chapter," said he, " was for me like the tail of Alcibiades's dog." The Court and the Parliament looked on ; all that was done was that the poor lay censor was dismissed, for the crime of having believed that the doctors would do their duty better than he. Three editions were sold before the official condemnation had as yet appeared.

The Sorbonne thought it of consequence to give that condemnation in as ample and complete a shape as possible. Meantime, having got the length of thirty-seven propositions,

it thought these should be published—but intitling the list merely *Indiculus*—a little index, that it might be understood that it was not yet finished ; and Voltaire thereupon added an epithet that seemed to have been made for the word—*Ridiculus*.

It was he who, in reality, managed the whole affair. “ It is amusing enough,” he writes to Madame du Deffand, “ to send from the foot of the Alps to Paris rockets to explode over the heads of blockheads.” These blockheads were Riballier, the poor syndic of the Sorbonne, whom he takes care to make *Triballier* ;\* Coget, a professor at the *Collège Mazarin*, whom he makes Cogé, then *Coge pecus*—for one would have said that by some strange fatality the very names of the persons whom he wanted to overwhelm seemed to serve his object. Sabatier he turned into *Savatier* ;† while Patouillet and Nonotte had no need of being mutilated in order to their suggesting ludicrous ideas. In 1770, when the assembly of the clergy decided on the publication of a collection of the best works in favour of religion, it was a Dr. *Bonhomme* (Goodman), that was charged with the task.

Avenged, and more than avenged, Marmontel had only to let matters take their course ; and so he yielded with an edifying complacency to the steps that saved him from all personal danger. He went to see the archbishop ;‡ he agreed to a conference with the doctors, and perhaps even asked for it. There, while making concessions on some points, he led them to burn their fingers more and more on that of toleration, or rather of intolerance. The archbishop himself, more flexible than they on many others, threw himself determinedly on the maxim of Bossuet, that “ those who will not have it that the prince should use rigour in the matter of religion, are in an impious error.”

\* *Triballier* means “ to go wagging along.”

‡ M. de Beaumont.

† *Savatier*, a cobbler.

Such was still the position of the clergy of France, at Paris, at the close of the reign of Louis XV. This desperate principle did at that moment more mischief to religion than all Voltaire's pamphlets. Marmontel triumphed. "The question was reduced," he says, "to the simplest, the most striking, the most trenchant terms. They would have had me, I could say, to acknowledge the right to compel belief, to employ for this purpose the sword, tortures, the scaffold, and the stake; and I refused to subscribe to that abominable doctrine." And his friends proceeded to circulate at court, in the city, in the parliament, everywhere, this somewhat amplified yet true summary of the Conflans conferences.

A divine who had become an Encyclopædist, Turgot, the future minister of Louis XVI., was now to give the finishing stroke. Amid the general agitation, behold, there appears a little piece of writing in which the propositions that had been condemned by the Sorbonne, are simply placed over against the contrary assertions, necessarily true, says the author, because the others are false; and the pamphlet was in fact intitled: *Thirty-seven Truths opposed to the Thirty-seven Impieties of Belisarius*. Now those thirty-seven truths were for the most part absurdities or horrors. "Truth," Marmontel had said, "shines with its own light; men's minds are not to be illuminated with the flame that consumes a victim at the stake." Then, according to the Sorbonne: "Truth does not shine with its own light; and it is with flames that men's minds are enlightened." Thus spoke the pitiless pamphlet. Marmontel, on his return from a visit to Germany, found the censure posted up at the gate of the Academy, but, says he, "the Louvre porters seemed to have agreed to wipe their brooms on that placard. Neither court nor parliament interfered. I was merely told to keep quiet," and *Belisarius* continued to be printed and sold with the royal sanction.



Five years afterwards the author was historiographer of France.\*

VI.—Thus the magistracy and the court declined to associate themselves any longer with all the susceptibilities of the clergy; they seemed even to amuse themselves with leaving that body, from time to time, to sustain single-handed its struggle with their common enemies. This was neither very prudent nor very honourable; but how could they allow the sword of the laws to be placed at the service of those ideas of another age, of that intolerance which gloried in having neither the wish nor the power to make any concession? The clergy obstinately persisted in putting on the same line the fundamental principles of religion, of morality, and of social order, and those of its own power; how could others continue to follow them into those hazardous fields where, as we have said, one had to defend simultaneously both the good posts and the bad, but especially the bad? In this very affair there were long conferences between the Government and the archbishop on the subject of the *mandement* which that prelate was preparing against *Belisarius*, and in which he set himself to establish, with the utmost asperity, the right and the duty of using the sword against innovators in religion. These debates delayed the publication of the *mandement* till 1768; but he softened down in it a few words only, and intolerance was once more preached, in the beautiful style of the eighteenth century, as fully and as plainly as it had ever been done in the barbarous jargon of the thirteenth. †

\* Duclos was appointed to the same office after publishing his *History of Louis XI.*, condemned by the Parliament.

† A burlesque dialogue was circulated between God and Father Hayer, editor of the *Christian Journal*. On God speaking to him of toleration, the Father exclaimed:—

“Heavens! what is this I hear? Can it be so,  
The Lord Himself has fallen so very low?”

But the current ran in another direction. All the laws which it had been thought right to make in concession to the suggestions of the clergy, had already, in practice, either to be very much mitigated or allowed to fall asleep. The Protestants who had so much to suffer, were not, however, treated nearly so rigorously as was enjoined by the laws which the clergy had obtained against them, and of which the bishops never ceased to solicit the execution. Infidelity, though treated more tenderly, lay equally obnoxious to those terrible edicts, the surest rampart against which was found in their very severity. In 1757, in one of those sallies of intolerance which only indicated weakness and hastened decrepitude, a declaration of the king, registered in parliament, pronounced the penalty of death "against the authors of all writings tending to attack religion, to stir men's minds, to undermine the royal authority," &c. Here fifty or sixty authors, with Voltaire at their head, were at one sweep devoted to the scaffold; yet we don't see that this edict inspired them with the slightest apprehensions, and it was only adding to other singularities of the time that men were seen at full liberty, and more powerful than ever, who had been condemned to die.

On other occasions, it was the Government that showed itself more severe than the Sorbonne. In 1775, for example, the archbishop craved from the latter body a censure on the *Eloge* on Fénelon by La Harpe, which had been crowned by the Academy. The Sorbonne, recollecting the case of Mar-montel, refused. Thereupon an *arrêt* of the royal council appeared *suppressing* the discourse, that is to say, condemning it to be read twenty times oftener than it would otherwise have been.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

- I.—The Academy—Louis XIV. and Saint Louis—The question of the Crusades—The Abbé de Besplas—The Abbé de Bassinet—The Abbé d'Arty—A Sermon by Voltaire.
- II.—How people entered the Academy—What Dumarsais said of it—Little difficulty and little shame in lying—Voltaire on his knees to the Jesuits.
- III.—Great Lords and Prelates at the Academy—Election of the Count de Clermont—Singular yoke-fellows—Long-continued embarrassments upon the death of Voltaire—Other annoyances to which the Academical prelates were exposed.
- IV.—The University—*Non magis Deo quam regibus*—The burning of the *Hôtel-Dieu*—*The Triumph of Faith*—Ridiculous books—Absurd customs—Miracles.

SINGULAR also was the position of the Academy amid the debates of that epoch. Although liberal in a majority of its members, and infidel in its chief leaders, it had to discharge its functions, right or wrong, as part of the machinery of the old organization. It proposed at one and the same time both philosophical subjects, in the new sense of the word, and religious subjects; it crowned discourses against which Louis XIV. would have fulminated, and it went on adding to the more than finished monument erected to the glory of that prince. In 1752, it was still in the humour to propose, as the subject of a poetic prize : *The Tender Affection of Louis XIV. for his Family*.

Another king, whose compulsory *Eloge* clashed still more directly with the well-known sentiments of the learned body, was Saint Louis, the Academy's patron in heaven, while the

other Louis had been only its protector on earth. Year after year, on the 25th of August, it attended a mass which was invariably followed by the panegyric of the sainted king.

There was one point in this panegyric which, above all others, was looked forward to with impatience. Since it had become the fashion, after Voltaire, to view the Crusades as the mere result of an absurd and ridiculous fanaticism, the question was sure to be put long beforehand, how the preacher would extricate himself from the difficulties of that part of his subject. Openly to blame the Crusades was impossible; to praise them was also impossible, unless at the risk of being the butt of sarcasms, and of depriving the sermon—although in other respects quite a masterpiece—of every chance of success. Hence incredible efforts of ingenuity; hence, too, the grand attraction of the solemnity.

It had even happened two or three times that the preacher, ridding himself of all his trammels at once, passed over with arms and baggage, into the far from Christian camp of the majority of his hearers. In the *economic* sermon of the Abbé de Besplas, which we have already mentioned, Saint Louis was called simply Louis, and the author so warmly caressed all the tastes and all the ideas of the epoch, that the audience clapped their hands in the very church. In 1767, the Abbé de Bassignet began without a text. As little did he introduce an *Ave Maria* after the exordium, and then he passed the Rubicon by speaking of the Crusades as Voltaire had spoken of them. The Abbé d'Arty, in 1749, had been less trenchant; but it is a curious fact that his sermon was composed by Voltaire himself. A respectable sermon, on the whole, very correct, very cold, very academical, with a regular text, but of which the preacher makes no use, and with an *Ave Maria* pinned to an invocation with which Mary had nothing to do; divided, in short, into three heads, and crammed with advices to kings.

On coming to the Crusades, behold, Voltaire quotes his own testimony, and finds a method of saying, but indirectly, all that the pulpit interdicted. "It does not belong to me to treat as rash persons those who in this enlightened age condemn the enterprises of the Crusades, in former times held so sacred. I know that *a celebrated and learned author*\* seems to wish that the Crusades had never been undertaken. His religion will not allow him to believe that the Christians of the West should regard Jerusalem as their heritage. Jerusalem is the holy city, consecrated by the mysteries of our redemption; but it is heaven, God's habitation, that is the patrimony of the children of heaven. Reason, further, seems to disapprove of Europe depopulating herself in order to ravage Asia to no purpose; that millions of men," &c. &c.

These ideas have incontestably their true side. Even in those of his writings in which he delivers his opinion on these wars with the greatest freedom, it is not his reasons that displease you, but that obstinate determination of his to make no allowance for times and places, and to scoff at a zeal which was associated with the noblest sentiments.

In the sermon, the reasons once given, he shows more fairness. Without admitting—he never admitted it—that religious enthusiasm may be a grand and noble incentive to action, he sees in it at least an excuse. "Every man," says he, "is led by the ideas of his age. A crusade had become one of the duties of a hero."

It is to be regretted that we have no collection of these discourses. We should be able to follow in them, year after year, the invasion of the pulpit by the new ideas; we should but too well see in them how all men are influenced by those of their time, and that if a crusade was, in the thirteenth cen-

\* Did he insert these words himself, or is it an addition of the abbé?

tury, one of the duties of a hero, infidelity had become, in the eighteenth century, one of the conditions of eloquence.\*

II.—It was one of the conditions also of a man's entering the Academy; yet external orthodoxy was, as formerly, indispensable. In order to find your way into the Academy, said Dumarsais, you must be on good terms with everybody, from your Creator to the *valet-de-chambre* of the minister. Accordingly, there was not a candidate that had not to act several parts, and to get himself pardoned either for orthodoxy by the liberal leaders, or for his liberalism by the orthodox leaders. "Had there been an Academy at Rome," added Dumarsais, in a letter to a friend, "and had it been conducted according to the same principles as ours, Cicero would have been excluded for his scepticism, Virgil for his Eclogue of Alexis, Horace for his impure verses, Lucretius for his atheism, and Tacitus for his hatred of despotism. Who, then, would have been admitted? The grand flamen, the grand augur, the *valet-de-chambre* of Tiberius, the preceptor of Claudius, the man who taught Nero the harp, and so on." This sally betrays the man who had been refused admission; for there were at that very moment in the Academy men against whom more might be said than against Horace and Lucretius; but this is not the answer that D'Alembert gives, and his answer is curious: "It is easy to reply," says he, "to this indecent attack . . . that Lucretius would have employed in painting and praising nature the talent which he profaned in outraging its author; that Cicero would himself have expunged without difficulty those passages of his works in which he turns into ridicule the religion of the Romans," &c. We know not what those men would have done; but D'Alembert

\* *Eloge* of the Abbé Girard.

made a liberal use of that dissimulation to which he alleges they would have had recourse.

But we have already shown to what an extent people generally, at this epoch, found little difficulty and felt little shame in lying. It was an admitted maxim, in some sort, that all methods were good by which a man might rid himself of hindrances. How, besides, could one have felt any scruples when the Government itself tacitly sanctioned all the frauds that were usually employed to disarm it or to set it asleep? Unless it chose to dissolve the Academy altogether, or to condemn it to receive none but second and third-rate literary men, it must have allowed infidels to enter it. People contented themselves, therefore, with closing it against the more audacious—Diderot, for example—but all the rest, with the aid of a little suppleness, contrived to find admission.

Sometimes they had rather long to wait. Voltaire had reached the age of fifty-two when the court permitted him at last to seat himself in that blissful arm-chair to which his reputation had long invited him; and even then he had found it requisite, in order to have the last obstacles removed, to cast himself at the feet of Madame de Pompadour, of the king, and even of the Jesuits. Nothing more curious than his letter to one of their chiefs, Father de la Tour.\* He begins with a eulogy on the pope;† he goes on to speak of the Jesuits as their warmest friends would not have spoken of them at that epoch. "As for Holland's libel, which reproaches me with being attached to the Jesuits, I am far from replying to it as I did to the other, by saying, You are a slanderer; I will say, on the contrary, You speak the truth. I was brought up during seven years with men who take pains, gratuitously and indefatigably, to form the minds and the manners of youth.... I am always astonished that people

\* Feb. 7, 1746.

† Benedict XIV.

should accuse them of teaching a corrupting morality.... Compare the *Provincial Letters* with the *Sermons* of Father Bourdaloue. In the former one may learn the art of raillery, that of representing indifferent things under a criminal aspect, that of insulting with elóquence ; from Father Bourdaloue one may learn to be severe to himself and indulgent to others. I will make bold to say that there is nothing more contradictory, nothing more shameful to humanity, than to accuse of relaxed morals men who in Europe lead the hardest lives, and who go to confront death at the extremities of Asia and America.\* So much for the Jesuits.\* After that come the Christian protestations : "I will reply to the author of the libel as the great Corneille did on a like occasion—I submit my writings to the judgment of the Church. I declare to him that if ever there has been printed in my name a page that could scandalize, were it only the beadle of his parish, I am ready to tear it to pieces before him ; that I desire to live and to die in the bosom of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church."

The Jesuits, the king, the pope, all Europe knew perfectly what Voltaire was and what he thought. But appearances were saved ; he was elected. Had not Montesquieu saved himself by presenting to Cardinal Fleury, who had seemed to wish to oppose his election, an *expurgated* copy of the *Persian Letters* ? As for the offensive passages, it had

\* He had often offered them incense before this. In 1750, he wrote to Father Vionnet : "It is long since I have been under the standard of your Society. You have hardly a punier soldier, but, at the same time, none more faithful." In 1754, in a letter to Father Menou, confessor to King Stanislaus, he calls their Society "a respectable Society which ought not to have any enemies. You know," he adds, "how I have ever been attached to your Society, and to your person." Yet Menou was one of the very persons he had slandered with the greatest pleasure.

Although the reign of falsehood be far from having come to an end, we must say, for the honour of our age, that a duplicity so patent and so brazen-faced would now be pronounced infamous.



been unknown persons, his enemies apparently, that had intercalated them.

III.—Each of those elections was an event in France, and indeed in Europe. When we see what they are at an epoch when more things take place in a year than then took place in thirty, we can easily figure to ourselves what they were in that huge void, especially when the mere name of the candidate was a challenge given to the old laws, to the old manners, to the old throne.

Some official representatives of the old French society still held a place in the bosom of the Academy. The great lords and the prelates figured there in the proportion of a third or a fourth of the immortal forty.

As for the great lords, they had begun to receive them no longer except with a little sneering or indignation,\* but without daring to throw off the old usage of not keeping them waiting long, and of officially estimating at a high rate the honour they were so kind as to confer upon literature. In 1754, while the members were taking their places at a meeting for the election of a successor to M. de Boze, the Maréchal de Richelieu asked the president Hénault for whom he meant to vote. "For M. Bougainville," replied the historian. "I bet you will not," said the Maréchal. Hénault thought this a joke, for Bougainville was the only candidate. But no. A letter was brought from the Count de Clermont, a prince of the blood, declaring his acceptance of the honour which, he said, they were to offer him. The members looked at one another, gave their votes, and the great lord was nominated; but—and this the court thought monstrous—the vote in his favour was not unanimous. Was it that Hénault had

\* Duclos begged in his will that he might not have one for his successor.

taken up the Maréchal's bet? Perhaps; but the Academy, at all events, had no great cause of self-satisfaction in its new member. He would not even submit to a public reception. He came once, but it was at an ordinary sitting, thanked the members in a few words, remained for a few minutes, and never made his appearance again.

The prelates, those of them even who were also great lords, generally attached more importance to their being academicians, albeit it sometimes threw them into positions sufficiently critical. To go no further, it was a strange enough spectacle to see bishops side by side with those whom they damned in every new *mandement* they issued. People became used to it; but there were enough of occasions to bring out the incongruity in all its oddness. In 1763, a few months after the grand quarrel about Crebillon's obsequies, it was a priest, the Abbé Radonvilliers, that pronounced at the Academy the *éloge* on De Marivaux; and it was the Cardinal de Luynes who, as director, had to make the reply—that is to say, who had to repeat the *éloge* in other terms. Previous to this, it had been an archbishop, Languet, that received Marivaux; and that same archbishop had also had, on another occasion, to receive at one and the same time a dramatic author and a bishop, La Chaussée and Boyer. Let us add that he was the author of the famous *Life of Marie Alacoque*, one of the most melancholy rhapsodies of legendary literature. In 1762, we are told of a singular enough task for a clergyman, whether bishop or not: "Madame Saurin, who combined the graces with wit, having been brought to bed of a boy, the Academy has appointed a deputation to wait upon the wife of their colleague with their felicitations. M. the Abbé d'Olivet was charged to deliver the address, and spoke with the utmost possible eloquence."\*

\* Bachaumont.

When Voltaire, in 1778, reappeared at the Academy, the prelates escaped with merely not having to submit to the ordeal of meeting with him; but his death threw them into endless embarrassments.

He had been refused burial; his remains owed their being allowed to repose, as people say, in holy ground, to a fraud. The clergy were fain to say nothing about it, and to leave his coffin undisturbed; but they refused to celebrate the funeral service, which took place in the Church of the Franciscans on the death of each of the Academicians. The Academy, led by the Encyclopædists, decided that no more such services should be celebrated until Voltaire had had his. The King of Prussia had thought it a good joke to have one celebrated for him in the Roman Catholic church at Berlin. In Paris, at the close of 1779, more than eighteen months after the death of Voltaire, matters were still in the same state.

The prelates were absenting themselves. Their anguish was the subject of much amusement; the grand affair was to bring them to a surrender. Three of them happened to appear at an ordinary meeting, when the question was suddenly brought on. The Cardinal de Rohan, the grand almoner, offered to have the service performed in the chapel of the Louvre, but only after there should have been one in the church of the parish in which Voltaire died. The Archbishop of Lyons, M. de Montazet, remarked that he might be called upon, as primate of the Gauls, to try the matter in the last resort, and that consequently he could give no opinion as an Academician. The Archbishop of Aix, in fine, proposed an evasion. Why not institute an annual service for the soul's repose of all defunct Academicians? M. de Voltaire, in this way, would participate in those prayers which would be offered up, so far, for him. This, it will be thought, was significant enough. The advice was taken; but the king would

not have it so, and the question has never been brought to an issue.

It was not at the Academy only that the prelates sometimes had reason to repent of their being present.

Six or seven years after this quarrel, while Beaumarchais was printing at Kehl, with the secret sanction of the Government, his edition of the complete works of Voltaire, this same Cardinal of Rohan, Bishop of Strasbourg, thought it his duty to publish a *mandement* against that undertaking. But he was afraid of the Encyclopædists. He wanted to deal tenderly with everybody; and everybody, as he ought to have foreseen, was dissatisfied. The Encyclopædists, accustomed to make the louder outcry the more tenderly they were dealt with, thought it shameful, infamous, for an Academician to permit himself to denounce the works of a colleague; the other party, with more reason, were indignant at the tenderness shown by a bishop towards Voltaire. That *mandement* was, as a whole, an act of courage; but, in detail, a tissue of cowardly concessions.

IV.—Side by side with the Academy, which was philosophizing itself more and more, there was the old University of Paris, immovable, obstinate, which had been on the point, under Louis XIV., of getting the Parliament to pronounce a prohibition against any departure from Aristotle, which gloried in having undergone no change since Saint Louis. It looked sour at the court, which allowed it to agitate itself in its ancient dust. It looked sour at the Parliament, which had too much youth and levity for its taste. From time to time it threw itself heavily into the strife; but soon returned to its own darkness, to lament in syllogisms the blows it had brought upon itself.

In 1772, on the occasion of the prize being offered for Latin

eloquence, it put itself again in motion. *Non magis Deo quam regibus infensa est ista quæ vocatur hodie philosophia.* Such was the subject proposed to the competitors. The phrase means, in good Latin, that modern philosophy is no less the enemy of kings than of God; but in translating it word by word, you have, on the contrary, that the said philosophy is as little hostile to kings as to God—in other terms, is no enemy either to altar or throne. Thereupon, great was the jubilation in the camp of the philosophers. The double meaning was laughed at; the University was laughed at. It is amending its ways, it was said; it repents of having calumniated the philosophers. As good Christians, they forgave it; and Voltaire, to begin, launched at it one of his most pungent farces.\*

While all this was going on, the burning of the Hôtel-Dieu took place. The archbishop published a *mandement* on the subject; and, contrary to his custom, he put nothing into it on the subject of infidelity. "Why, here," said the wits, "we have M. de Beaumont becoming a convert too;" and D'Alembert, as if by way of thanking him, got the Academy to vote a sum of twelve hundred livres, to be paid to the archbishopric for the rebuilding of the Hôtel-Dieu. A Voltairian sarcasm was to be found everywhere, even beneath a good work.

That same year, in fine, just as infidelity was rising to the apogee of its strength, a new blunder was committed in the institution of a yearly festival to be called *The triumph of the faith*. On the appointed day, a crowd flocked to St. Roch's—for it was there that the archbishop was to officiate. The people waited, but he never came. Some said he was unwell; others, that he was afraid. Afraid or not, he did not appear;

\* *Discours de Maître Belleguier, ancien avocat*—(Speech of Master Belleguier, retired advocate).

and a last incident occurred to put the laughter on the side of those whom the festival had been designed to disconcert. As the archbishop's coming had been fully expected, no priest could be found in the church who had not broken his fast, and one had accordingly to be sought for to say mass.

Ridiculous books and absurd customs now came in aid of the philosophers. "What shall we have next to laugh at?" said Voltaire to some one who spoke of the downfall of religion as a matter of certainty, and very near. The Alexander of sarcasm was, like the other, distressed to think he should have nothing more to conquer. But absurdities were not to be so soon exhausted.

What a lucky thing, for example, for them and their friends the publication of a book with this for its title: "The Christian Religion proved by a single Fact; or, a Dissertation in which it is Demonstrated that the Catholics, whose tongues were ordered to be cut out by Huneric, King of the Vandals, spoke miraculously during the rest of their lives, and in which the consequences of this Miracle are deduced against the Arians, the Socinians, the Deists, and, in particular, against Rousseau."

In default of old miracles, new ones were to be had. The convulsions ran their course, and a person called Robbé, formerly the author of indecent publications, became their historian. He spoke of retouching, in the convulsionary sense, the poem called *Religion*, whose author had died under suspicion of belonging to that sect. The police, which interdicted the Jansenist miracles, authorized others. A miraculous ceremonial took place at the Holy Chapel on Good Friday night. "It was generally attended," Bachaumont writes in 1770, "with a prodigious affluence of spectators. It is at midnight that all the possessed persons that wished to be cured repair to that church. M. the Abbé de Sailly, grand

chorister, touches them all with a bit of the true cross. Immediately their howlings cease and their convulsions are stopped." But behold, in 1777, a possessed person resisted all these touchings! He vomited forth horrible blasphemies, calling down lightning, and denying God. The populace were seized with terror. He was driven away with great difficulty, and his cries long after resounded in men's terrified ears. Was he a maniac? Did he act a farce? This has never been known. The year following, the whole fashionable world of Paris met at the Holy Chapel; they wanted to hear and to see this prodigious blasphemer. But ordinary subjects only came, and these allowed themselves to be cured.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

- I.—What one naturally feels when contemplating these struggles—The Parliaments—Could they have seriously believed themselves the representatives of the nation?—Why Voltaire and his friends did not support them—Their pride and their faults.
- II.—They paid for them dearly enough—Malesherbes the precursor of Mirabeau—The registration of the Edicts—Historical review—Popularity acquired by financial questions—The Parliaments scouted as soon as the Revolution approached.
- III.—Voltaire would not that those who have nothing should vote the taxes—Their preponderance indicates a return to feudal despotism—The contrary system may in some cases be absurd, but it is the most equitable, upon the whole—The true source of murmurs, in Voltaire's opinion—Few men have really loved the people.
- IV.—Murmurs in the eighteenth century.—Violent discontents and morose discontents—Those of that, and those of the present day.

THUS were all the springs of the old machine utterly worn out at last; thus were all the arms it had ever employed during the most submissive times broken in the hands of a superannuated Government.

It is a strange feeling that comes over one in contemplating these struggles. It is in vain for you not to be on the side of the aggressors; you are as little disposed to abet the other side. In vain would you say to yourself, these first unsettled, along with the abuses, all the foundations of government; in vain are you indignant at the sarcasms levelled against all that you hold to be most sacred. You find it difficult not to laugh with them at the mishaps of the Government, and you cannot check your laughter without feeling



quite as indignant at the champions of the faith as at their adversaries.

This king, this Louis XV., in whose name wicked books were committed to the flames, why, his own private history would form the wickedest of them all, and the worthiest of the flames.

This Government, round which all the old notions cluster and intertwine, has an impure courtesan for its centre.

These prelates, who fulminate against impiety, have most of them picked up their mitres at the feet of that same courtesan.

This Parliament, in fine, which glories in its severity towards the enemies of the monarchy, itself has been and still is that monarchy's most dangerous enemy.

Was it so, however, without being aware of it? It can hardly be admitted that men conversant with the nation's history could have honestly fancied themselves invested, as a Parliament, with a political authority. Created by the kings of France, these courts could have no commission but what they received from the Crown. They had to administer justice, to apply the laws, nowise to control them. The right of remonstrance was a gift of the royal authority. There did not even exist a single act that positively conferred it on them. Had there been any such act, it is clear that the royal authority might dispense with its provisions, and reduce again to nothing what owed its whole existence to it. "Who ever commissioned the Parliaments," says Mercier,\* "sometimes to deliver over the people to the king, sometimes to resist the king without the people desiring it?" There was a loud cry of indignation in France when Louis XV. said,† "To me alone the legislative power belongs, without dependence on and without

\* *Tableau de Paris.*

† *Bed of Justice of 3d May 1766.*

participation with any one." But historically there could be no reply.

Yet the attempt was made. Many works appeared. One of the best, intituled, *Tableau de la Constitution Française*—(Picture of the French Constitution), fixed three periods :

In the first, the Parliament was the general assembly of the nation ; it elected the kings, and it made the laws.

In the second, it was still the assembly of the nation. It no longer elected the kings, but it concurred in making the laws.

In the third, it is merely a court of justice, but it has preserved the power of verifying the laws.

This book made a great noise. The transitions are managed with great ability, but could seduce such minds only as had been already gained over. Between the Nation-Parliament and the Court of Justice Parliament there is an abyss which was very slenderly bridged over by the mere resemblance of their names.

One is, at first sight, astonished at the little support given to the Parliaments by the philosophical party. Voltaire in particular was opposed to them. His *History of the Parliament of Paris* seems to have been written, excepting some sallies of temper, by a champion of the royal authority.

But though historically in the right, impartiality was so little a habit with him that we may fairly be allowed to see as little of it here as elsewhere. One feels that he could cordially forgive the Parliaments for their grand struggles with the crown ; but what he could not forgive was their resistance to the new ideas. The Parliament of Paris, in his eyes, is, before all else, the court that burnt his books, and that was enough quite to neutralize any merit arising from its anti-royal liberalism.

It was evident, in point of fact, that the intervention of

the Parliaments had often laid a restraint on the excesses of royal authority ; it was evident, in point of right, that when that intervention went the length of resistance, it was revolt. The Parliaments, we repeat, could not be deceived. Whatever the big words under which they sought to shelter themselves, they knowingly violated their oaths.

We are not called to enter upon the details of those endless struggles. Possibly it might not be difficult to show that the crown was far from having been always in the wrong, and that the Parliaments, in many cases, were anything but the defenders of the people. We should see them often cheerfully grant, for the sake of a few smiles from the court, the registration of dismally bad laws ; we should see them almost invariably reserving their courage for questions that bore only on their own corporate rights and selfish interests. What we should have to show more easily still, is the damage they did, we shall not say to the royal authority, but to authority in general—to the principle of authority. On this ground, the demolishers had no better auxiliaries than those that burnt their books. After having wrestled with absolute power, the Parliaments wrestled with those liberal ideas which that power had decided upon admitting. People saw them resist even the abolition of the *corvées*, and the establishment of religious liberty ; and inoculation found no small difficulty in obtaining favour at their hands. In the question of the Jesuits,\* they had sottishly subverted the resentments of infidelity ; and then set themselves, as if by way of compensation, to subvert those of intolerance.

II.—Shall we be told that the Parliaments paid, at the Revolution, too large a tribute to the scaffold, to justify our thus recalling their preceding peccadilloes ? No doubt some thus

\* We have already said why we abstain from speaking of them in this work.

died nobly ; but the very number of the victims comes rather in support of what we have said. In a revolution, the first to be devoured are always those who have helped to bring that revolution about. The equivalent of that famous saying of Mirabeau about the force of bayonets—a saying which it is uncertain if Mirabeau ever uttered, had been heard from the mouth of a man whom Louis XVI. made his minister, and whom the scaffold claimed—Malesherbes. “Sir,” he had said, as president of the court of aids, to the prince who came on the part of the king to have an edict registered, “the king himself has announced his sovereign will ; the most august and the most dread ceremony\* has already informed us of the orders which you are about to execute. The people are groaning under the redoubled weight of the taxes ; and when they see them renewed after several years of peace, they despair even of ever seeing an end of their misfortunes. . . . Why should the arrival of the princes of your august blood always bring with it the suspension of the laws, and reduce justice to inaction ? . . . It is necessary that you should know that those magistrates whom you would reduce to silence, have no wish to raise their voice except that they may convey to the king the complaints of the people. . . . These are, said Henry the Great, extraordinary courses *that savour only of force and violence.*” These last words, for all that they were attributed to Henry IV., were not the less a terrible blow to the royal authority ; and the prince to whom the court of aids gave this dangerous example, was the Duke of Orleans, the father of the famous *Philippe-Egalité*.

Thus were there professed, in full Parliament, doctrines which had appeared rash in the *Encyclopédie*. Rousseau had been the first† to say in it that there is no legitimate impost but that which receives the nation’s consent. “The founda-

\* A Bed of Justice.

† In the Article, *Political Economy*.

tion of the social compact is property. . . . It is true that by that same treaty, every one is bound, tacitly at least, to pay his quota of the public wants ; but as this engagement cannot infringe on the fundamental law, and as the evidence of want is supposed to be acknowledged by the tax-payers, one sees that in order to be legitimate, this assessment ought to be voluntary. . . at least sanctioned by the general will expressed by a plurality of voices." This was tantamount to taxing with illegitimacy all the imposts raised at the time.

It is true that the sovereigns had up to a certain point recognised this doctrine by submitting their financial edicts, or *bursaux*, as was said, to parliamentary examination and registration. The need of money, the desire to appease the murmurs of the people by giving to the laws of finance an empty shadow of popular confirmation, had led them to be more compliant on this head, and to tolerate the doctrine, at least practically, that an impost could not be collected previous to the registration of the edict that fixed it.

This even became the ordinary starting-point from which to establish, as a general principle, the authority of parliaments in the State. Be it observed, that, at that epoch, there were no political questions properly so called. Ecclesiastical questions were the sole questions that did not present themselves bound up with that of taxation ; and even they touched upon it when the pope and his financial rights in the kingdom fell under discussion. The freedom of the press was the only freedom people had begun to call for, and of that the Parliaments were as little the partisans as was the Crown. Other franchises had not been so much as formally stated ; they were the objects merely of a vague aspiration, on which neither the Parliaments nor the king had to pronounce their opinions. After Rousseau had taught the sovereignty of the people, many years elapsed before any serious intention ap-

peared of demanding the exercise of it; even at the first dawnings of the Revolution, few men had got thus far. The Parliaments had never, during the course of the century, found any occasion to apply their liberalism to political questions properly so called. It was on questions of taxation that they sought and found an easy popularity, but one of base alloy. Money is what of all things has least that is noble in it; it lowers more or less all that it touches—men, things, questions. It is quite as immoral on the part of a man of the opposition to seek popularity by crying out against the taxes, as it is on the part of the man who governs to purchase partisans with gold.

The Parliaments, besides, in arrogating to themselves the right to legitimate taxes, were very far from going the length of considering it as belonging in principle to the body of the nation. It was not until 1787 when, already broken loose, the Parliament of Paris pronounced its opinion in that sense: "Considering that the nation, represented by the States-General, has the sole right of granting to the king the necessary subsidies; that the nation alone can, without partiality, deliberate on choosing the means of procuring for the said lord king the succours which shall be evidently demonstrated." It was resolved that the king should be besought to convene the States-General "previous to any new impost." Thus the Parliament condemned itself, since it had for so long a period sanctioned of itself alone the imposts decreed by the crown. Accordingly, hardly had the king promised those States-General so much demanded, when the Parliament took alarm, and lost no time in decreeing that the meeting should take place according to the forms followed in 1614. Nothing more was wanted to make it hooted, and to deprive it of all the popularity it had acquired by forcing the hand of Louis XVI.

III.—But nobody, except Rousseau, and even he had not clearly explained himself on the subject—nobody, we say, had as yet expressed the idea that the taxes could be voted by those who, possessing nothing, would have nothing to pay. “Ought those who possess neither land nor house in this society,” said Voltaire in 1765,\* “to have a voice in it? They have no more right than a clerk in the pay of certain merchants to regulate their trade; but they may be associated, either on account of services done or for having paid for their association.”

Here we find what would sound ill in many ears at the present day, and even the name of Voltaire would be a feeble rampart against the indignation which these words would create. Shall this be a reason for our not repeating them? We shall do more; we shall add that they comprise an evident, an incontestable truth.

We have already seen universal suffrage leading at last, among other things, to despotism; will it be denied that here too it leads to it? Despotism in the matter of taxes consists, according to Rousseau, in their not being consented to by those who have to pay them. Then it follows that wherever a majority of those who have nothing† shall be found voting the tax, or naming those who do so, you no longer have that which in these matters constitutes liberty, and it is, in truth, the same state of things as when the taxation depended on nobles who fixed it, but did not pay it. Add that an absolute sovereign is always more or less held in check by the thought of the responsibility he assumes and the murmurs he provokes, while a sovereign multitude is seldom subject to scruples, and regards itself as having no responsibility.

It is easy, on the other hand, to enumerate the absurdities into which we are thrown by acknowledging the right of con-

\* *Republican Ideas.*

† *Proletaires.*

currence in the government of the State in those only who possess and who pay. But instead of straining hard to prove what, besides, is clear—that fortune is no warranty of talent and of virtue, perhaps it would be more useful to search out the quarter from which, in States not yet endowed with universal suffrage, the cry for it proceeds. Will that cry be found often raised by true merit forgotten, or by virtue not acknowledged? Are those persons who complain most of being allowed no weight in the balance, such for the most part as would bring into it the merit of virtue or of patriotism—are they such, in fact, as one could most regret to see excluded? Why, these last, from the very circumstance that they have both patriotism and merit, have ever liked better to raise themselves gradually by other methods than to arrive at power with a flood, of whose violent passions and caprices they are not unaware.

Voltaire had admirably seized the spirit of the murmurs of his time, and perhaps of all times, when he said: “When the lord of a château, or the inhabitant of a town, accuses absolute power, and laments the oppression of the peasantry, believe him not. People hardly complain of evils which they do not themselves feel. . . . What people hate is absolute power in the fourth or fifth hand; it is their having received in some palace the rebuff of some insolent valet that makes people groan over desolate fields.”\*

Sad it is to say, but all too true—few, very few men have sincerely loved the people, and these are not the men that have made revolutions in the people's name. For the greater number, there must be personal sores to open their eyes to the public sufferings. No sooner has a man some heart-grievance, than he seeks another to redress; and if he cannot find any, he invents them. Hence so many revolu-

\* *Thoughts on the Public Administration.* 1753.



tions in countries where there are no longer motives, and not even pretexts for making them.

IV.—Motives and pretexts at that period abounded; but the Government was so fully conscious of them, that it gave almost the fullest liberty to complain.

“Are not all the advantages of society,” said Rousseau,\* “for the powerful and the rich? Are not all favours, all exemptions reserved for them? Is not public authority entirely in their favour? Let a man of consideration plunder his creditors, or commit other frauds, is he not always sure of impunity? Are not the blows he distributes, the violent acts he commits, the murders or assassinations of which he makes himself guilty, all made matters that are hushed up? . . . Let that same man be robbed, and the whole police are immediately in motion; and woe to the innocent whom he suspects!”

To each of these generalities the public gave proper names. With ten such lines there was enough to frighten for a month all the discontented in the kingdom.

But don't let us suppose these discontented persons to have been too like ours.

Those of the present day may be arranged into two classes—the violent and the morose. There is no need to describe the violent; they have been seen often enough at work. The morose are either really unhappy men, or those *incompris* (misunderstood and unappreciated persons) who groan over the ingratitude of an age, for which nevertheless they have done nothing.

Of violent grumblers, in the eighteenth century, there were none. Even those whose theories were so soon to pass into violent acts cannot be said to have knowingly preached dis-

\* *Encyclopédie*. Article already cited.

order and hatred. It was in the name of reason that they called for the redress of abuses; and the reign of reason seemed so near, and so certain, that they fancied themselves in sober earnest the prophets of that second golden age. The old social world accorded them enough grounds of satisfaction, to foster this idea. It maintained the old abuses, but without daring to defend them. It would break out, at distant intervals, in acts of severity towards those that attacked them; but this official wrath did not prevent kindly treatment—and it was among the privileged, among the noble, that the boldest found the warmest reception. There was really no room, therefore, for indignation or outcry; and those even who made an outcry could remain socially on good terms with the very persons whom their pens had attacked. Rousseau's ardent declamations never shut a house against him, never lost him a protector. It was he that set himself to flee from them, not they that pursued him. It would have been thought bad taste to be uncivil to any one on account of his social opinions, however opposed they might be to the whole existing order of things.

Of morose grumblers there were very few. We might even say that Rousseau was the only one in whom that sullen agitation, which is so common at the present day, really fermented; and even he made no personal complaint against the social constitution which he attacked. It was reserved for our dreamers to throw blame at every turn on society, and to charge it with all the individual wrongs of which they are, or say they are, the victims. People in general had good sense enough to comprehend that there are inequalities, and unjust acts, from which no state of society will ever be exempt. "When people criticize us," says Chateaubriand somewhere, "what should we do, we poor pretenders to renown? Should we think that the world reels on its foundations?"

Should we obstinately persist in our faults, fully resolved to subdue the age, and make it pass under the caudine forks of our silly imaginations? Alas! no. More humble, inasmuch as we possess not the unparalleled talent which may now be met at every turn, we should seek first to justify ourselves, next to correct ourselves." The hissed author cursed the public; but he never went so far as to figure an age of gold in which there would be no more hissing. He might groan, indeed, in his garret, because left there to starve; and though he might abuse the patron who forgot him, or an unjust cabal, he never dreamt of considering society—that is, everybody—as responsible for the folly or the partiality of some. Those men whom we accuse at the present day, and justly, of having unsettled the foundations of society, had, one and all, with the exception of Rousseau, the firm intention of attacking only its abuses.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

- I.—Why we are, in some respects, less wise—A true principle ill applied is more dangerous than a false one—*Philosophy—Radicalism*—Revolutions without a specific object can end only in despotism.
- II.—The *Encyclopédie*—Often censured, at the present day, for what is best about it—The Encyclopædists did not subvert for subversion's sake, but with the view of rebuilding—Meaning now attached to the word Progress—Improvement is not self-improvement.
- III.—No ill was done which people did not fancy themselves in a condition to repair—No plan—How the original idea of the *Encyclopédie* arose.
- IV.—Its secret history—Voltaire's joint labours—The seventh volume—Annoyances and discouragement—Audacity and victory.
- V.—Fluctuations of Government and of public opinion—Voltaire grows cold—Palissot.
- VI.—Fréron—To what all Voltaire's adversaries were reduced—Necessity of reacting against the foolish or cowardly indulgence of one part of the public.
- VII.—Our reasons for insisting more on the evil than on the good—Bad tendencies even in the true; disastrous results flowing even from good principles—What people read in the future—Leibnitz—Peter the Great—Rousseau—Voltaire—Grimm.
- VIII.—Conclusion.

PEOPLE, then, were somewhat wiser in those days than in ours. Let us only observe, that the frivolity of the time counted something in this result, and that the depth of the present discontents is not unconnected with a certain progress. That serious tone which people have carried into philosophy, into history, and into art, they have carried, or believe they have carried, into social questions; when people ceased to laugh at the vices of society, and began to curse it, it was at bottom the same revolution as that which led to poetry being

regarded as no longer a play of the mind, but as an emanation from the heart. We have had, and we still have, monstrous social systems, as we had twenty years ago monstrous poetical systems—which, notwithstanding, reposed on an idea that was more fertile in itself than the theories of former days. But a good principle, ill applied, is more dangerous than a false one. The false strikes with barrenness whatever is deduced from it; the true gives a stamp of truth to all the errors that are attached to it. It is thus that, in the eighteenth century, so many attacks could be considered as harmless speculations; whereas, in our days, the minutest questions unsettle everything. Accordingly, we know not whether we ought to respect ourselves for being more serious, or to regret the frivolity of that period. Voltaire felt alarmed when he saw his contemporaries in the way of becoming serious. "It was for him a source of ill humour and disquietude. All seemed likely to be subverted were the French ever to become grave. What he had said to an infantine people, did not seem to himself to be quite without danger when said before a nation of men."\* He had reigned by means of laughter; no sooner did people cease to laugh, than he felt himself a rake.

Words have their importance in history. The word *Philosophy* implied a promise of peace and order—a promise horribly ill kept, at the end of the century, by the disciples of those who had made it, but sincerely made by the latter: the word *Radicalism* is a declaration of war. *Radical* means the man who would go to the roots, and extirpate whatever appears to be not according to the principles of the day. Now, it is by means of these roots that a people, like a tree, stands erect; if you cut them off, you leave that people to be swept away without defence by the despotism of every storm. By depriving them of their old laws, their old institutions, their

\* Lacretelle. *History of the Eighteenth Century.*

old habits, you take from them, in the name of liberty, all the supports that stayed it up against oppression; it loses all coherence, and becomes the prey of the first occupant.

This is the inevitable result of all revolutions made without any determinate object, from a vague desire of liberty, of movement. When you shout *Liberty for ever!* without attaching any positive meaning, any real object to that cry, you only prepare the way for despotism by subverting everything that could arrest it. It is by urging you to shout thus for liberty, that oppressors of every kind lead you to demolish with your own hands the institutions in whose bosom liberty might find a refuge. Be not deceived: an institution may have its worth although neither founded nor managed by the people; from the simple fact of its being an institution, it becomes, when despotism arrives, a rampart for all. What matters it at what period, or by whom, a citadel was built? Those who would have you pull it down are not your friends.

II.—Let us come now to that which the eighteenth century vaunted its erecting in the place of all else,—the *Encyclopédie*.

Of that work it is now the fashion to say nothing but evil. This, in many respects, is but to do it justice; but when we see it abused by some who glory, on the other hand, in continuing its work, we cannot refrain from inquiring whether their antipathy may not have arisen rather from the little of good that it had than from the bad with which it was filled.\* It was a signal folly, assuredly, to fancy themselves in a con-

\* Could the *Encyclopédie* be judged of as an ordinary book, one might admire it in respect of the labour it cost. A host of articles, which one might find at present written, and well written, in twenty different works, had to be wholly composed for the first time; there are some very short and very weak ones, which we know to have been the fruit of laborious researches. But as that glory was by far the least in the eyes of the chiefs of the enterprise, one need not dwell upon it.

dition to raise the definitive monument to the progress of the human mind. According to Grimm, in order to the *Encyclopédie* reaching "the degree of perfection humanity can bear," all that was required was to have a second edition.

But this signal folly had its wise side. It checked those indefinite aspirations, those convulsive plunges forward which are caused by the idea of progress, foolishly or perfidiously set up as a doctrine by itself. Even while establishing itself on the ruins of the ancient barriers, the *Encyclopédie* would have fain been a barrier itself. It seemed to say, "Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther." This was hardly logic; but there was, nevertheless, a precious relic in it of that felt need of authority, the absence of which has become more and more deadly since it has come to be thought a duty not only to move back but even to wrench away all barriers.

The *Encyclopédie* men were wrong, then, in not believing in any progress to be made after them;\* but that error did not prevent propitious advances from being made, and mischievous ones were rather checked by it. Rousseau was still farther in the wrong in believing in nothing but retrogression and decline; but he has here and there uttered a truth too much forgotten by our worshippers of progress. The evil does not lie in believing in it. On the contrary, human nature needs to feel that it has an unlimited career before it. Without that, great things must be looked for in vain. But faith in progress is, in itself, a mere vague feeling, a force equally fruitful according to the direction it may take, in good or in bad effects.

Progress, in our days, means material ameliorations. Some openly avow this, and refuse to recommend, nay, even to con-

\* In saying that they did not believe in it, we do not pretend to say that they affirmed that they did not believe in it, for many passages might be adduced in which they have spoken of such future progress. What we wish to say, and what is true, is, that they seemed convinced that people would have few advances to make after them.

ceive any less gross ; others, more spiritualist in words, are hardly more so in reality. *Améliorer* (improvement) and *s'améliorer* (self-improvement) are generally taken to be synonyms.

Within certain limits they are. No doubt in improving its material circumstances, a nation opens up one of the roads that lead to its moral improvement.

But of what use is a road if nobody uses it? In order to material improvement leading to moral improvement, we ought to remember that the latter is the object ; and this is what was never more forgotten than at the present day.

The forgetting of the moral end has not only had for its result the rendering useless or fatal many advances good in themselves ; it is this that has thrown us into the present subversions, for it is this that has led the people to give the name of progress to every kind of change. It is clear that if the term had been reserved for those kinds of progress in which some advantage was to accrue to morality, people would have looked twice before they destroyed so much without knowing how it was to be rebuilt.

III.—The grand demolishers of the eighteenth century had this, then, to recommend them before ours, that they did not destroy from the mere fever of destruction, that they did not regard an instance of destruction as an instance of progress from the sole fact of something being destroyed, that, in fine, they made it an object of concern to replace what might be thrown down. It was not, as we have already remarked, that they did not make prodigious mistakes. Events have proved how much they deceived themselves in pretending to substitute morality for religion, reason for duty, philosophical fraternity for Christian brotherhood ; they saw all their barriers overthrown much more easily than they had overthrown other



ones. But, we repeat, in the midst of their intoxication, of their exaggerations, of their lies—for even these we have seen that they made no scruple of employing—still they had a sort of conscience; they did no ill that they did not believe themselves in a condition to repair.

This is an important remark; it has been too much neglected in the appreciation of that epoch. Say, and you will be right, that the thinkers of the eighteenth century threw out ideas that tended to the destruction of everything; say not that this was, in fact, their plan; or, to speak more exactly still, say not that they had any plan. It would appear, if we are to believe what some historians say, that a meeting took place one fine day under the presidency of Voltaire, that the crusade (against everything) was voted, the parts distributed, and the march commenced. This is to judge the eighteenth century after the manner of those who, in judging the sixteenth, begin by attributing to Luther from the first the intention and the plan of the whole Reformation.

The very idea of the *Encyclopédie* was due to foreign and fortuitous circumstances. An Englishman of the name of Mills, and a German, Sellius, had announced a translation of the large dictionary of Chambers, and Lebreton the bookseller, who had been employed by them in getting some formalities attended to, had the privilege granted in his own name. Thereupon followed a quarrel and a rupture. Mills returned to England; Sellius died. But subscriptions had been collected; the bookseller did not wish to lose the advantage of them, and then it was that the idea occurred of publishing an original work.\*

Even dating from this epoch, in fine, the *Encyclopédie* ought not to be judged as an enterprise the plan of which was

\* The new privilege was granted in 1746. The date has been remarked at a later period. It was the 21st of January.

strictly marked out. Every eulogy and every censure starting from that idea would of necessity be incorrect. Let us not see in that immense project either the ardour of genius or the atrocities of Machiavelism. It was merely a continuation of the work that had been doing for thirty years. It was set about without any very clear intention beyond that of enlarging the circle within which men were allowed to think. We have seen elsewhere how much those trammels enhanced the power of the book, and with what ardour things were spoken fully out, of which authors had previously been unable to say more than a half or a fourth part.

IV.—The secret, that is to say, the true history of the *Encyclopédie*, is to be found in the letters of Voltaire and of his chief correspondents. The true chief and the soul of the undertaking was Voltaire. Prudence required that his name, too much compromised as it was, should not appear among those of the authors; but the public knew his affinities with them, and this was enough to acquire for the *Encyclopédie* his friends in all countries. The articles of his fashioning were, moreover, more numerous than was believed. In 1756, we find him composing as many as eleven all at once. "I send to the bureau that instructs the human race," he writes to D'Alembert, "the articles *Gazette*, *Généreux*, *Genre de Style*, *Gens de Lettres*, *Gloire* and *Glorieux*, *Grandeur* and *Grand*, *Goût*, *Grâce* and *Grave*."

The hardihood of the writers, impossible in the larger articles, sought refuge in those that appeared likely to draw upon them less of the attention of the censorship. In 1757, on Voltaire complaining of "little orthodoxies" which people had thought themselves obliged to scatter over whatever touched on theology and metaphysics: "No doubt," replies D'Alembert, "we have some bad articles; but with divines

for censors I defy you to make them better. There are others less open to the light, where all is repaired. Time will enable readers to distinguish what we have thought from what we have said. You will, I believe, be satisfied with our seventh volume."

Voltaire was satisfied, but that volume raised terrible tempests. The censors, it must be owned, had done their work very ill; and it was singularly comical for such a book to appear, *with approbation and privilege of the king*. The privilege was accordingly withdrawn; and as the articles most complained of were those which had not had to pass under the eyes of the ecclesiastical censors, it was afterwards restored only on condition that all should for the future be subjected to the inspection of the latter.

Upon this, the discouragement was complete. "I doubt if your article *History* will pass with the new censors," writes D'Alembert to Voltaire in 1758, "and I will send it back when you choose. . . . But nothing presses; I doubt if the eighth volume will ever appear. See, then, the host of articles which it is impossible to compose: *Heresy, Hierarchy, Indulgence, Infallibility, Immortality, Immaterial, Hebrew, Jesus Christ, Jesuit, Inquisition, Jansenists, Intolerance, &c.* Once more, we must be satisfied with what we have got."

But Voltaire would have them persist. Concessions had proved of no avail; he would have them abandoned. When the next volume should appear, he would have it published with a preface which would bring blushes to the cheeks of "those cowards who have allowed insults to be put upon the men who, alone at the present day, labour for the nation's glory."

Audacity had succeeded more than once. In 1752, at the time of the *arrêt* that suppressed the two first volumes, the Government seemed ready not only to stop all continuation of

the work, but to treat its principal authors with the utmost rigour. A few months elapsed, and all was changed. Those who had approved of the suppression, or had called for it, were ashamed of having done so; and D'Alembert was authorized to say, in the preface to the third volume, that "the Government seemed desirous that an undertaking of this nature should not be abandoned." It was the fashion to laugh at the uneasiness of the Jesuits, and to attribute their rancorous hatred of the *Encyclopédie* to disappointment at seeing their own Encyclopædia, the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, eclipsed.

V.—The dispositions of the Government varied also according to the state of its relations with the clergy. United, it was ever more or less at the expense of the liberty of the press; divided, the Government then relaxed the reins. The years in which the clergy had to vote the *gratuitous gift* were always troublesome ones for the *Encyclopédie*. In 1770, on the representations made to the Archbishop of Rheims, the reprinted volumes were seized, an enormous mass of them was transported to the Bastille; and when the booksellers reclaimed, the only answer they got was to have the gate of the dépôt built up. It remained built up, and the books had time to perish; but hardly had the assembly of the clergy been dissolved, than there was a new impression printed off, and the Government shut its eyes.

But at the epoch when we have seen Voltaire grow indignant at D'Alembert's discouragement, and advise a fulminating preface for the next volume, the wind was decidedly foul. D'Alembert replied, that before thinking of the preface, the volume would need to be written, and that was simply impossible. Upon that, Voltaire lost his temper. He desired, he insisted, that all that had been got ready for the volume

should be sent to him; he says he should be "afflicted, indignant," if the authors of the preceding volumes were to stoop to some compromise with the Government, and continue "to write with the gallows in their eye." "Wait but a single year," he continues, "and there will be but one cry to engage you to continue as men, at once free and respected." But the public seemed rather, on the contrary, to become cold. Many of the friends of the *Encyclopédie* noiselessly withdrew from it—some influenced by fear, as the Government seemed disposed to persist, the rest because the work seemed hardly to reach that point of perfection which had been so often promised and so loudly proclaimed. Voltaire had done it more harm than any one, partly by his public eulogies, which more and more compromised it, partly by his secret criticisms, which everybody could read in the letters that were passed from hand to hand in Paris.

We see, in fact, towards 1760, a notable decline in his zeal. On every new annoyance that the Government caused, or allowed others to cause, to the philosophers, we find him showing just enough of indignation to save his appearing to betray them. On learning that Palissot's comedy, *The Philosophers*, was about to be acted: "Is it possible," he writes,\* "that they should be allowed to play that impudent farce with which we are threatened? It was thus that the destruction of Socrates was set about; it was with the comedy of *The Clouds* that the priests began to prepare for the ruin of the sages." However, after the play had been acted, while the *Encyclopédie* was cut to the quick, and loudly called for the piece's being interdicted, and the punishment of the author, Voltaire preserved an astonishing calm. It is true that Palissot sent him his play, declaring that he did not confound him with those whose oddities he had portrayed.

\* April 1760.

Rousseau, to whom Palissot paid the same compliment, replied that he did not accept "this horrible present;" whereas Voltaire, who did not think himself bound to put on any great airs of virtue, replied with perfect politeness; and even in the reflections that he casts upon him, he has infinitely less the air of a wrathful censor than of a man who transmits, for mere fashion's sake, a reprimand which he is very indifferent about making impressive. In vain did his friends in Paris do their best to stimulate his resentment. He has ever the same thing to say,—that the play is well written, and that if the substance is bad, the form is according to the best methods. "Palissot is a fine fellow. He prints *français, aurais, ferais*, with an *a*, which is more than the Encyclopædists have done. This funny rogue has no want of wit, and has even some talent. But my very dear Palissot is a slanderer, he is a downright wretch, and I have had the honour to tell him so in the best possible humour."\* Ere long he produced the *Ecossaise* (Scotchwoman), which was meant to soften the effect of *The Philosophers*; but whether from design, or from the impossibility of making the one a direct reply to the other, it hardly hit anybody but Fréron.

VI.—Fréron! What place shall we assign to him? What was he at heart? Is it to conviction or to envy that we must attribute his obstinate struggles against the giant of his age?

Let us rather take a general view of the position in which every adversary of Voltaire and of the Encyclopædists found himself.

There is nothing more difficult, in general, than to attack consequences, when one admits, in whole or in part, the principles from which they flow; nothing more difficult, above all,

\* Letter to D'Argental, August 1760.

than to attack some after having admitted others. It is as if you were to find yourself opposed in battle to a medley of friends and enemies.

Hence we may trace the perpetual embarrassment of those writers who made efforts not to yield to the torrent. They were men of their own age; they could not but belong to it. All the franchises called for by modern philosophy they wished for, like everybody else; they were quite aware that the old edifice required rebuilding. Only, they considered that people set about it very badly, and in such a manner as to render reconstruction impossible.

Some made it a duty to blame in the writings of the day only what they thought blameworthy, and to give their candid tribute of praise to all that was true and good. But the good was so mingled with the bad, the true so bound up with the false, that this impartiality deprived their attacks of all nerve and vigour. Those who had entered on this course soon perceived that it led them to nothing, if they did not even become indirectly auxiliaries to the men they had meant to combat. Their criticisms were laughed at, and their praises turned to good account.

Others, again, took the course of blaming everything, and denying that any good could come out of the encyclopædical school. They did not confine themselves to demonstrating, what was true, that the best principles became dangerous in their hands, they would not give their chiefs the credit of possessing any real merit, any veritable talent, even literary. Thus it was that Fréron—to return to him—saw nothing truly beautiful, nothing truly good, in all Voltaire's baggage.

Voltaire, it is true, contributed not a little to push his enemies into this untoward extreme, and to keep them there. We have already seen in what manner he treated them. The grossest outrages, the most monstrous calumnies, were mingled

with his sarcasms. A collection of those alone which he lavished against Fréron, would form the most frightful heap of insults that ever flowed from any pen.

But Fréron was less sensible to those insults, which were refuted by their very exaggerations, than indignant at the ridiculous indulgence with which at that time, as at the present day, honourable but weak people made talent and glory an excuse for everything. Such persons are always the first to shelter the worst things a man has done behind the good he may possibly have done; they will not take the trouble to comprehend that when a man has preached successively order and disorder, faith and impiety, virtue and vice, there are in reality two minds, two hearts, two lives—two men, in fine, of whom the bad has no right to inherit the authority of the other. Pardon an offence in consideration of some old services rendered; never pardon a bad book in consideration of a good one, for this is to make you an accomplice in it. Because we have loved and admired the *Harmonies*, should we not condemn the *Girondins*? Must we not venture to say a word against those detestable volumes, without beginning with doing homage to their predecessors? In spite of yourselves, you will have thrown over the follies of the tribune the deceptive mantle of the poet.

Thus, or nearly so, did many persons who were anything but friendly to Voltairian infidelity. M. de Voltaire has written against Christianity, but he composed *Zaire*, and some magnificent Christian verses; he wrote *Candide*, but he composed the *Age of Louis XIV.*; he composed the *Pucelle*, but he also composed the *Henriade*. Impartiality, under this form, is folly, and of the worst kind. Never say of an author that though he has written bad things, he has also written good. Do all justice to the latter, but never in such a way as to excuse the former.



Fréron was capable of appreciating and liking good works. If he ever seemed to have no relish for them, if he even often bitterly criticized what Voltaire wrote in his happiest manner, we must not blame either his intellect or his heart, so much as the necessity of reacting against a silly admiration which went to nothing short of elevating evil triumphantly upon the pedestal of good; let us blame that inconsistent and feeble public which was incapable of distinguishing between the eulogy of a work and an apology for its author. With such a public, from the moment you cease to blame, you approve; from the moment you pronounce a eulogy, you are sure that that eulogy will cover, to its eyes, things which you blame. This is what led Fréron to do violence to himself in never praising Voltaire, and never admitting that there was anything good either in him or in his friends.

VII.—But injustice is always injustice. Even had this policy had full success—and it had none—it is bad policy.

Let us not be accused, then, of having pursued, even here, a similar course. Although there has been more space devoted to censure than to eulogy in this work, there has been in this, on our part, neither injustice nor policy.

We beg that it may be observed, in the first place, that the eulogies which we have gone over so rapidly have long been beyond all contesting. It was enough, therefore, not to contest them, and to let it be seen, when the occasion offered, that we fully subscribed to them. Were we aware that any persons were still disposed to refuse to Voltaire the possession of wit and talent, and to Rousseau eloquence, then eulogy would have appeared to us to be necessary.

It will be recollected, in the second place, that we have had to study not so much writings as tendencies, not so much facts as the results of facts. With this plan, the only one

that possesses any veritable interest at the close of a century, it would have been against our conscience had not blame gone farther, and much farther than eulogy.

As for the tendencies, in the first place, we have seen how rarely it happened that they were not bad, even in cases where the outward aspect was good. The parallel study of public facts and of private details conducted us almost always to untoward discoveries. Not one of the lives of that time presented itself to us with that calm gravity which stops and defies censure. Wherever we have looked for unworthy motives, we have found them; and we have too often been compelled to see them even in those cases where we should have been happy to find none but worthy ones.

The results that followed we have found inscribed over the entire face of Europe, and threatening to inscribe themselves there in more and more terrifying characters. We have not undertaken the defence of the abuses that roused resistance, or attacked the truths that were taught, or condemned the rights that were consequently asserted; but we have examined whether those abuses were wisely attacked, those truths wisely taught, those rights wisely asserted; whether the benefit, in short, had been attended and followed by such circumstances as left room for gratitude. To reproach a philosopher for all the evil which might have emanated, after his departure, from his doctrines, would often be unjust; to absolve him completely is weakness and folly. Were you to have nothing but truths in your hand—and a truly wise man never flattered himself thus far—you are still much to blame if you cast them into the air without troubling yourself as to what they shall become in falling upon the ground. To accord to the speculative mind (*au penseur*) the right of reposing on the absolute goodness of his positions and of declining all ulterior responsibility, is to deliver the human race, with-

out defence, to all the temerities of reason, to all the waywardness of folly, to all the delirium of pride.

Leibnitz, who died in 1716, had already perceived the profound alteration that the moral principle had undergone among many modern nations. In a writing published only after his death, and which may be regarded as the dying testament of that great man,\* he predicted the subversions of which that century was to witness the first acts.

When Peter the Great, in 1718, paid a visit to France, "people remarked," says a historian,† "the involuntary emotion with which that firm soul of his was seized every time that he pressed the young king in his arms. He seemed to foresee the misfortunes that awaited a child destined to wear a crown that was tottering to its fall." The child escaped, thanks to his very indolence, the misfortunes that Peter the Great seemed to foresee; but that mute prediction was not the less eloquent.

While genius took alarm, wit made it its glory to rejoice in the new era which it saw was dawning on society.

Some, like Rousseau, rejoiced seriously; others, like Voltaire, expressed their satisfaction in laughter.

Rousseau, faithful to his system, saw nothing in coming changes but a return to nature. "We are approaching," he had said in *Emile*, "the age of revolutions. All that men have made, men may destroy. The only ineffaceable characters are those which nature impresses, and nature makes no princes, no rich men, no great lords."

Is this indeed true? Let us distrust truths that are too clear; they have always a false side. Men are born equal, but not so as that they should and can remain equal. Why call natural the state in which man is at his birth, that is to

\* *Nouveaux Essais sur l'Entendement Humain*—(New Essays on the Human Understanding).

† Lemontey. *Histoire de la Régence*—(History of the Regency).

say, when he has no will, no intelligence, no strength, rather than that which he has always and everywhere reached by the regular development of his faculties, of his instincts? The state of revolution and of anarchy, is the return to the nature—of brutes; and is that the nature of man?

Accordingly, it was not in this sense that the Voltairian school rejoiced in the advances of the Revolution. It desired to see nothing in it—and this error had at least some nobleness in it—but the enthronement of reason, of civilization rightly understood, on the last ruins of prejudices and of barbarism. "All that I see," wrote Voltaire in 1767, "sows the seeds of a revolution that will arrive without fail, and of which I shall not have the pleasure to be a witness. The French are slow in reaching everything; but they reach it at last. Light is so diffused at short intervals that it will burst forth on the first occasion, and then there will be a pretty uproar. The young are fortunate; they will see fine things." Thus, one sees, there was no fear, no doubt as to the expected results. The tide was to advance just as far as the wise wanted; it was to advance no farther. The conflagration was to consume the bad and respect the good. "This revolution," added Grimm, in 1768, "will at least have this advantage over preceding ones, that it will be effected without costing blood."

VIII.—Let us stop. It were useless, it were almost cruel to contrast with these pacific illusions the picture of those terrible realities that were so soon to issue from them. These are a sort of recriminations which one should know how to use soberly even towards the dead.

Let all that indignation which we might have felt, as we proceeded with our task, at the sight of their levity, their acts of wanton injustice, and their frands, be reserved for those men

who have resumed and amplified, in our days, coldly, methodically, and without any of their generous illusions, their work of levelling and of anarchy.

All the pity with which they inspire us when we see to what a pitch they allowed themselves to be deluded, when we ponder what they would have suffered had they seen their disciples at work, let us know how to feel for those whom so many lessons have not instructed, those who have eyes but not to see, who have ears but not to hear, who have reason but not to make use of it, and a heart, but one that never opens except to the suggestions of envy and of hatred.

But let us repeat as we come to a close, never let this pity, this indulgence towards the men be extended towards the things. War to evil, be it where it may. Let not either good intentions, if there still be some, or talents, or success, or anything that might have served to shelter it in the last century or in our own, be to it a rampart to shield it from our blows. Let us know how to detect it, and how to attack it in all its forms. Never has it had more than at the present day ; it is the Proteus of the modern world. Courage, then, and patience ! Yes, patience—for God does not hurry. He may have accorded a long reign yet to falsehood. *Patens, quia æternus*. Courage, however, courage ! He who attacks evil is never alone in the combat. Was David alone before Goliath ?

This is what we said on commencing our book ; it is this that we repeat on completing it.

THE END.

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